MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER 50c PDC

ALL NEW STORIES

EXCLUSIVE!

VOICE OF BLOOD

Gripping

MIKE SHAYNE

Short Novel by

BRETT HALLIDAY

FIGHT ON HURRICANE ISLAND

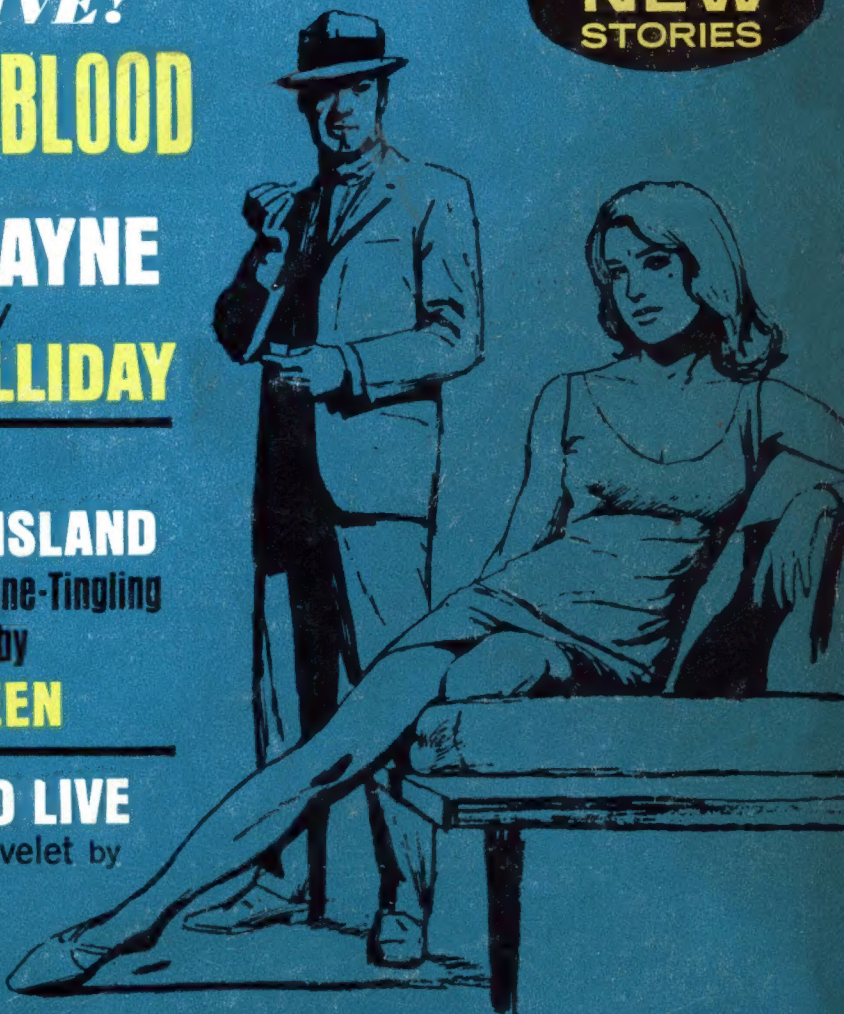
The Year's Most Spine-Tingling Adventure Mystery by

JOSEPH GREEN

24 HOURS TO LIVE

A Miss F. B. Ivy Novelet by

CHARLES VENTURA



And many other great stories

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER, 1966 Vol. 19, No. 6

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

VOICE OF BLOOD

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Somewhere, deep in the Everglades, a desperate kid was holed up, ready to sell out his life rather than surrender. And somehow Mike Shayne must get in there—and bring him back out alive!

. . . . . 2 to 54

A NEW MISS F.B.IVY NOVELET

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS TO LIVE
CHARLES VENTURA 58

A MEMORABLE NOVELET

FIGHT ON HURRICANE ISLAND
JOSEPH GREEN 82

FIVE NEW SHORT STORIES

SPECIAL TREATMENT
MORRIS HERSHMAN 55

FIFTY CENTS TO GET OUT
RON GOULART 102

ANCESTRAL MUSCLE
ED LACY 114

PETE THE GREEK
ROBERT S. FISH 119

LOVE, KINDNESS AN AUTHORITY
RICHARD O. LEWIS 132

LEO MARGULIES
Publisher

CYLVIA KLEINMAN
Editorial Director

H. N. ALDEN
Associate Editor

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE, Vol. 19, No. 6. November, 1966. Published monthly by RENOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC. 56 W. 45th St., N. Y., N. Y. 10036. Subscriptions, One Year (12 issues) $6.00; Two Years (24 issues) $12.00; single copies 50¢. Second-class postage paid at New York, N. Y. and at additional mailing offices. Places and characters in this magazine are wholly fictitious. © 1966, by RENOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. Postmaster—return 3579 to 56 W. 45th Street, New York, New York. 10036

Voice of Blood

Somewhere in the trackless glades a desperate kid was holed up, ready to die rather than surrender to a murder rap. And somehow Mike Shayne must break through a deadly cordon of hate and fear and do the impossible—bring him back alive!

A NEW COMPLETE MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

by BRETT HALLIDAY

MIKE SHAYNE was late that morning. The big red-head had not been on an all-night job. He had been fishing with his Friend Tim Rourke of *The Miami Daily News,* and he felt just a little guilty. The slightly disapproving expression on the face of his brown-eyed secretary, Lucy Hamilton, did nothing to make him feel less guilty.

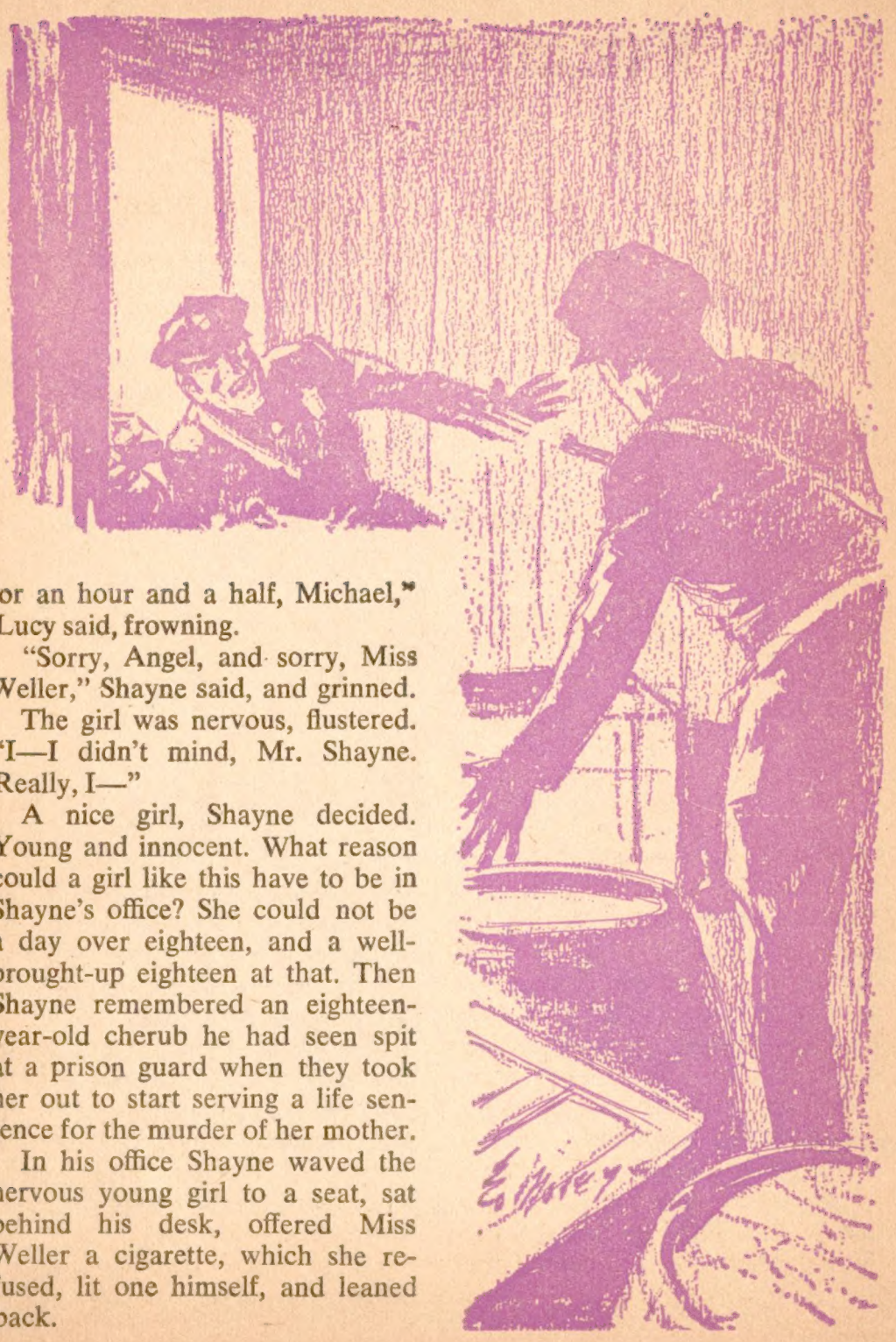
Maybe this was why he listened to the pretty young girl with sympathy, and ended up taking a case he did not need, that offered little money and less challenge, and was, in fact, a routine matter any rookie cop could have handled.

Or, at least, that was the way the case seemed at the time.

The pretty kid was waiting as he strode in, trying to look more businesslike than he felt after a long night of fishing and beer with the convivial Rourke. Lucy was not fooled. Her pert face was far from pert, her brown-eyes were somewhere below zero.

"Miss Weller has been waiting

© 1966, by Brett Halliday



for an hour and a half, Michael," Lucy said, frowning.

"Sorry, Angel, and sorry, Miss Weller," Shayne said, and grinned.

The girl was nervous, flustered. "I—I didn't mind, Mr. Shayne. Really, I—"

A nice girl, Shayne decided. Young and innocent. What reason could a girl like this have to be in Shayne's office? She could not be a day over eighteen, and a well-brought-up eighteen at that. Then Shayne remembered an eighteen-year-old cherub he had seen spit at a prison guard when they took her out to start serving a life sentence for the murder of her mother.

In his office Shayne waved the nervous young girl to a seat, sat behind his desk, offered Miss Weller a cigarette, which she refused, lit one himself, and leaned back.

"Okay, Miss Weller, let's hear it? What big trouble does a pretty young girl like you have on a fine day like this?"

"I don't know, Mr. Shayne," Miss Weller said. "Maybe—murder."

Shayne blew smoke, gently swiveled in his chair, showed no surprise. But he was thinking of the sweet little matricide who had laughed as they took her away because her age had let her beat the gallows. Miss Weller said "murder" as if it was a word she had never heard before, as if not quite sure what it meant.

"Maybe murder?" Shayne said.

The girl blinked, nodded. "Well, Tommy's gone, you see? I mean, I haven't seen him for days, and his parents won't say where he is, and I think they really don't know where he is."

She was a small girl, with lovely legs where they were crossed as she sat in the chair and leaned forward to talk. A blonde, the hair teased high in the fashion of young girls. She wore the short skirt that was "in" now, and her hard, slim legs showed halfway up her thigh. She did not know quite how to sit. Actually, she was too young to really be aware of how revealing her dress and bare legs were.

"Suppose we take it from the top," Shayne said gently. "Who is Tommy?"

The girl stopped her almost manic talking, looked confused as if she could not imagine that Shayne did not know Tommy. Then she flushed and nodded.

"I'm sorry." She took a deep breath. "Tommy Planck, he's my boy friend. We've been going together for three years. He's got a good job; we were going to get married soon."

The girl seemed ready to break down. She tried to smile, brushed her eyes, shook her head angrily. Shayne let her work it out for a moment, then he smiled gently to her, smiled with her as an old friend.

"You were going to get married, and you will," Shayne said. "Now what's happened to Tommy Planck?"

"He's gone," the girl said. "I mean, he's just gone."

"Left town?"

"I don't know where he's gone. He hasn't been to work for three days. His parents say he's gone on a trip but I don't believe they know where he's gone at all. They try to tell me he's gone on one of his camping trips!"

"Does he go camping a lot?" Shayne said quietly.

She nodded. "Yes. He likes to hunt in the Everglades, too, but—"

"Does he go camping without telling you?"

"Never!" Miss Weller cried. Then, "Well, he never used to. But—"

"But?"

"But he has a couple of times

recently. Only he always tells his boss, gets vacation time!"

"And this time he didn't?"

"No."

Shayne studied the pretty young girl. There was no denying that she was genuinely distraught. Her eyes looked as if she had not slept well.

"How old is Tommy?" Shayne asked.

"Nineteen, same as me," the girl said.

Shayne smiled. "What did you fight about?"

The girl's eyes widened. "Fight? We—"

"You had a fight, didn't you? What was it about?"

Her young face was almost haggard. "Yes, we had a fight, over a week ago. I don't really know what it was about. I mean, he was acting funny. You know? I mean, he was worried about something. He wouldn't talk. When I asked him what was wrong he got angry, told me not to hound him. He—he was funny. Like he wasn't with me, you know?"

"I know," Shayne said soothingly. "You had a fight. He went off without telling you. He told his parents not to tell you where he was. He's mad and he's thinking. That's all, Miss—What's your first name, young lady?"

"Patsy," the girl said, tears at the corners of her blue eyes now. "Why didn't he tell them at his job?"

"Probably he did, and told them not to tell you just as he did his parents. Life seems very dramatic at nineteen. It isn't really, Patsy. He'll cool down. He'll get lonely and he's come back to you. You'l get married and there'll be a lot of dramatic moments for a long time. Be happy. You're lucky you can both still feel you're important enough to be dramatic about."

Patsy Weller was silent for a time. Then her face turned up straight toward Shayne. The redhead narrowed his grey eyes. She should have been tearful, the tears had been there in her eyes, But there were no tears. Her eyes were dry, too dry.

"His best friend, George Hale, works with him. George has been on the camping and hunting trips a lot with Tommy. George likes me. He wouldn't lie to me. But George doesn't know where Tommy is."

Shayne was gentle as possible. "Boys stick together, Patsy. If you were older you'd know that. You still believe that it's you and Tommy against the world, but it isn't. If you were a woman, you'd know that for most people it's man and man, against woman and woman."

"You're wrong," Patsy said. "Or maybe you're not, not for most people. But George would tell me, I know that. And Tommy was nervous, touchy before we had our fight. That was what we fought about. He's been acting—funny."

Shayne watched the pretty girl.

The lack of tears meant that she had something more on her mind, something that really bothered her, something, perhaps frightening. She had talked of murder.

"You think Tommy's been murdered?" Shayne said quietly.

Patsy shook her head. "No. I think—"

She stopped. She could not say it. Shayne watched her closely now. She was, after all, really bothered, really afraid. Shayne prompted her, his voice soothing, strong and reassuring.

"You think what, Patsy? You tell me. No matter what it is, we'll solve it, all right!"

The girl did not answer. Instead, she reached into her white purse and rummaged around. She brought out a tiny clipping from a newspaper. She handed it to Shayne. Shayne looked at her, and then at the clipping.

It was a minor story from the back pages of yesterday's *Miami Daily News*. The few brief lines told of the finding of a body floating in Biscayne Bay. The dead man had been in the water about three days. He had been shot. There was no evidence of robbery. The man's name was Marko Kantor. He had a criminal record. That was all.

Shayne arched a bushy red eyebrow at Patsy Weller.

"I heard Tommy say that name," the girl said. "I know it was the same name. Marko Kantor. It's not a name you forget, Mr. Shayne. It sounds evil. I never heard of a man named Marko before. Tommy said the name twice, maybe three times."

"How did he say it?" Shayne asked. "I mean, why?"

"He said it over a beer one night a few weeks ago. He was a little drunk. He said men like that shouldn't be allowed to live. I don't know what started it; I can't remember. But I remember how angry he was."

"You're sure? About the name?" Shayne said.

"Yes. I couldn't be wrong. Marko Kantor. I knew it as soon as I saw that story. It jumped out at me," Patsy said, her voice scared.

Shayne looked at the story again. The man had been in the water just about the right time—since the last time Patsy Weller had seen Tommy Planck! The big red-head could see that the girl was thinking the same thing. Shayne felt sorry for her. She was in love with Tommy Planck. She was scared to death.

"All right, Patsy," he said. "I expect it's nothing at all. Tommy will turn up with apologies all around soon. But just in case, I'll look into it."

"Thank you, Mr. Shayne," Patsy Weller said, and the tears were in the corners of her eyes again.

After she had gone, Shayne sighed. Maybe it was a feeling of

guilt for his good-time fishing that he'd taken such a useless case. Or maybe it was her wet blue eyes. No matter how you sliced it, there was going to be little fun, and no profit. He could not charge such a vulnerable pair of blue eyes.

II

WHEN SHANE walked in into Miami police headquarters, he asked for his friend, Chief of Police Will Gentry. But Gentry was a busy man these days, with the enormous growth of the city, and the Chief was out. Shayne then asked who was handling the Marko Kantor killing. The desk sergeant directed him to Lieutenant George Bellow.

Shayne found Bellow in his cubbyhole office, moodily going over a long series of record files. Bellow was a short, stocky man who rarely smiled and rarely scowled. A man of even temper. Bellow had been on the Miami force for ten years. He had been a lieutenant only a little over a year, one of the many promotions as Gentry's force expanded with the city. The lieutenant looked up and waved Shayne to a chair.

"What's on your mind, Mike?"

"Marko Kantor," Shayne said.

"I wish he wasn't on my mind," Bellow said drily. He hefted the pile of record files. "Just a few of the boys who had some reason to dislike Marko."

Shayne looked at the pile of records. "He wasn't exactly popular?"

"You can say that again. Most boys with records pile up a few enemies, but Marko was a well-known louse on top of it. At least twice he fingered long terms on some buddies. He was known for beating the women, and he was a famous welsher on any losing bet over ten bucks. With a character like that, the only thing to wonder about is that he lived to be forty-two."

"How did he happen to miss forty-three?"

"Bullet in the chest. One shot, close range, a good job. There were powder burns. Probably prints somewhere, but the bay did a good job. He was shot, by the way, with his own gun. It was still in his pocket. What wasn't wiped, the bay took care of nicely."

"How long was he dead?" Shayne asked quietly.

"Three days when we fished him out, four now. The ME says he was dead before he went into the water, naturally, but maybe not too long. It's hard to tell after four days and the bay. ME says he could have been dead four or five hours before they dunked him."

It was just about the right time. Shayne tugged slowly on his left earlobe and thought about it. There was still no real connection between Marko Kantor and Tommy Planck, except the time and the fact that boy was missing. He saw Lieutenant Bellow watching him now.

"You have something, Mike?" Bellow said.

"No," Shayne said slowly, "not even a decent rumor. I've got a client who's looking for a friend. I thought it might be the body in the bay."

Bellow did not believe him. After all, the newspapers had the name right—Marko Kantor! "All right, Mike. You always play it straight. You'll let me in on it when you do have something?"

Shayne nodded. "Tell me more about Marko's friends."

"The friends are scarce. No one even came to identify the body yet. The enemies, now which end shall I start at?"

"Try the two boys he ratted on once," Shayne suggested. Bellow shook his head sadly. "Yeh, I had big hopes, but both those boys are safe in prison. We're checking out some of their friends, but both cases happened a long time ago, and both boys didn't have many friends either. Memories are short with criminals, unless they're Mafia, and these boys weren't."

"Friends of the women he beat?" Shayne asked.

"I've got two leads there. We're checking them out, but they don't look too good. The funny part of this is that with all his troubles, Marko seems to have been pretty quiet the last six months. I'm checking all the gambling places, and known gamblers who took his bets, but so far no luck. He's been out of sight."

Shayne rubbed his gaunt chin. With a man like Marko Kantor there were fifty suspects who would have killed him for the fun of it. But the lieutenant seemed worried about the lack of leads, and why had Marko been quiet for six months?

In a case of this type it was usually cracked within hours by some stool pigeon. Or the police talked to a few bartenders and friends of the dead man and the killer started running. Petty gang killings were usually open and shut, the killer taking little or no pains to cover his tracks because he killed in anger.

"What was his record like?" Shayne asked.

Bellow opened the thickest file. "Juvenile car theft in Detroit, juvenile burglary in Chicago. He grew up into a real robbery rap in Chicago. Then, when he got out, he tried bunco for a time in New York. He beat two raps and left town. He's been most places, and he's tried bunco again, blackmail, extortion, armed robbery and pandering. That's about the total. He was pretty slick—served only twice except for a few vagrancy beefs. He got out of Atlanta only a year ago.

"Since then he's been here, and clean as far as we can tell."

"It's a lot and not much," Shayne said. The big red-head scratched his gaunt chin. "He sounds almost too slick to get killed with his own gun up close like that. What about a woman?"

"We're checking it out. He was married once, to a Connie Faith. Divorced while he was in Atlanta. Record shows she lived in Little Rock then. We're checking. So far we've come up blank for a dame in Miami."

"What about his movements the day he was killed?"

Bellow checked the file. "Well, with a lot of blanks, he left his room and ate breakfast. He made a couple of phone calls. Later he was seen in his car driving out of town north. Later than that he was seen in a saloon on the Beach about nine o'clock that night. He was alone in the saloon, drove off in his own car—a black Ford Mustang."

"That's all?"

"That's it. Never seen alive again. I'll tell you, Mike, no one seems to be shedding a tear for old Marko. The way I hear it, if any of the boys know who killed him they won't tell. They figure the killer did a good turn for everyone."

"No word on anything he was up to?"

"Not so far," Bellow said. "One thing though."

Shayne arched a busy red brow. "What's that?"

"No car. We've had an APB out on that black Mustang since yesterday, no word."

"His car's missing?"

"Vanished."

"The bay?"

Bellow nodded. "That's my theory, only a car doesn't float up like a body, and its a mighty big bay. We're dragging. But first we're combing the woods for anyone who might have seen a black Mustang near the bay."

Shayne sighed. "How many Mustangs in Miami?"

"Don't even think about it. Still, we got a chance. We want a black Mustang near the bay after nine o'clock."

"Good luck," Shayne said.

"Yeh," Bellow said. "Any ideas?"

"None," Shayne lied. He had an idea. With a man like Marko Kantor he knew a place to go for an-

swers. It was not a source Lieutenant Bellow would have approved, or probably even believed, so Shayne did not mention it. Also, he did not yet want to bring the name of Tommy Planck into the case at all, which he would have if Bellow had known just how interested he was.

"Thanks," Bellow said.

Shayne tugged on his earlobe. "Except Marko was a very busy boy. That record tells the story. He couldn't have been the type that lies around idle."

"Meaning?" Lieutenant Bellow said.

"Meaning that if he was so quiet, he could have been planning something. Are there any unsolved robberies, muggings, con games, burglaries, on your file?"

Bellow shook his head. "Not in Miami."

"But he drove north once."

"He drove north," Bellow said.

"Have you looked for his MO?"

Bellow laughed. "What MO? Marko didn't have one. He tried everything. No, the only MO Marko Kantor had was that he was slick and a louse. A man like that shouldn't be allowed to live."

The echo was not lossed on Shayne. Those were the words that Patsy Weller had said that Tommy Planck had used when he talked about Marko Kantor. Apparently a lot of people had thought that a man like Marko should not be allowed to live. One of them had done something about it. Was that one Tommy Planck?

Shayne stood up. "Keep me posted, will you, Lieutenant? But I've got a strong hunch that Kantor was up to something in all those months that he was doing nothing. He was a confirmed gambler, yet he didn't gamble for six months. It doesn't fit that kind of punk; they do what the urge tells them and they don't change, unless they have something more important on their minds."

"I'll keep it in mind, Mike," Bellow said. "But this one has a good chance of going into the unsolved file."

Shayne agreed in his mind as he left the office of Bellow. It did have a good chance of being an unsolved case. He almost hoped it would be. Patsy Weller would not be glad to know she had fingered her sweetheart.

II

MIKE SHAYNE called his friend who had the sources to help—Big Vic Cartwright. Or, to be exact, Shayne called the offices of Big Vic —*Cartwright Associates*. The frosty voice of the operator informed him instantly that Mr. Victor Cartwright was away on business indefinitely.

"Never mind the recording, honey," Shayne snapped. "Tell Big Vic it's Mike Shayne calling, and do it fast."

Hearing the use of the name Big Vic the operator stammered and began to make clicking noises in Shayne's ear. Shayne grinned. It was amazing how bad temper got results. Whoever said that you catch more flies with honey than vinegar caught just that—flies! A big noise and a snarl got you a lot farther than a soft voice and a smile. A big stick did better than either, especially if backed up by a nasty snarl.

But nothing got him Big Vic this time. A smooth voice, male, came on the line and explained that Big Vic really was out this time, but if Mr. Shayne would care to come around later in the day, in person, they might have some word as to where Big Vic was, and when he possibly might be back.

"Thanks," Shayne said and hung up, grinning at the so very polite caution.

Even had Vic been there, Shayne would have to have presented himself in person before anyone admitted it, but the time would have been at once. It had saved Shayne a trip. He decided to use the time to work from the other end on Tommy Planck.

He went back to his car and drove out south to the address Patsy Weller had given Lucy—the address of the company where Tommy worked.

The *Acme Sheet Metal Company* was on the outskirts of Miami in an open area of vacant lots. Two

Lucy Hamilton

buildings: a long, low one story building of corrugated sheet metal with windows all along the top that was the factory; and a smaller, two-story brick building that housed the office.

Shayne parked in the parking lot and strode in the sun into the office building.

A not-very-pretty receptionist greeted him with a yawn.

"Yeah?"

"Personnel," Shayne snapped.

"Second door," the girl said

"Do I talk to the door?" Shayne said.

The girl glared. "Mr. Pomeroy. He's there. You looking for a job, big feller?"

"I got a job," Shayne said.

He left the girl glaring at his broad back with anger but a certain wistful dreaming about broad shoulders. He walked down the quiet corridor and knocked on the second door. A jumpy voice said, "Come in." Shayne went in.

Mr. Pomeroy was about half the size of a midget. The man was seated behind a desk much too large for him, and he seemed to know it. His eyes blinked, his hands tapped nervously, his mouth quivered in his narrow face with a tiny mustache.

He sighed heavily as he looked at Mike Shayne. The effect was so strange that Shayne looked behind him. The man noticed, blinked, spoke.

"Aren't you from the union?" Pomeroy said.

"No," Shayne said.

Pomeroy sighed. "It doesn't matter. They'll be here soon enough. I have to tell them no raise. There'll be trouble. I hate trouble. I never could handle the union. I told Mr. Jeffreys, but he says that's personnel. I just never could handle the union."

"Mr. Jeffreys should understand," Shayne said.

"I try to tell him."

"Mr. Jeffreys is the boss?" Shayne said.

"Yes," Pomeroy said, and then, "Who are you?"

"I'm from the police," Shayne said, and flashed his private badge just fast enough to be seen but not seen clearly.

Mr. Pomeroy paled again. "Police?" the little man said.

"Just some questions, no trouble," Shayne said.

"There's always trouble." The little man sighed again.

Life was hard for Mr. Pomeroy, as it was for all weak men who had the intelligence to know they were weak but not the strength to do anything about it but sigh and be miserable.

"Not this time," Shayne said. "I just want to know about two of your employees: Tommy Planck and George Hale."

"Tommy's not here. George is. You want to see George?"

"How long since Tommy showed up for work?"

Pomeroy sighed again and consulted his files. "Four days; he left early the last day."

"What does he do?"

"Tommy? Apprentice on the spot-welder. George, too. Only Tommy won't be. He went without notice or permission. I'll have to fire him if the union lets me."

"Can I see George?"

"Why not? Wait in the interview room. It's next door," Pomeroy said.

Shayne went into the next room as Pomeroy reached for the telephone. Inside the cold interview room, its lights a flat white, Shayne lit a cigarette. At least Patsy Weller had told the truth about the work —Tommy had left without telling the company, and would be fired when he came back. If he came back.

He turned as a man came into the room—boy, really.

The boy was tall, blond, skinny and smiling. George Hale

clearly had no fear of the police. He was wearing a shop apron. His face and hands were grimy; bits of metal clung to his shop apron, and the expression on his face told Shayne that George Hale liked his work.

The boy came forward just a bit hesitantly. Mike Shayne smiled to put him at his ease.

"George Hale?" Shayne said.

"Yes," Hale said. "You're from the police?"

"In a way," Shayne said. "I'm a private detective."

"A shamus!" the boy said. "Hey now. What you want with Tommy anyway? Who hired you?"

"His parents are worried. They don't know where he is," Shayne lied, watched for a reaction. He got it.

The Hale boy smiled foxily. "Nah, not them. I know them. They wouldn't spend a dime. Besides, they say they know where he is. No, it was Patsy. Yeh, Patsy brought you in, right?"

"Suppose she did. Is that bad?" Shayne said warily.

"Hell no. Patsy's worried and I don't blame her. A real good kid, Patsy. Only she got nothin' to worry about, not about Tommy anyway."

"Then you know where he is?" Shayne said quickly.

Hale was surprised. "Me? Hell no. I don't know where he is. What I meant was that when he gets back it'll be Patsy he goes for, you see."

Shayne felt a faint surge of optimism. "You mean Tommy has another girl? That's why he went away? With her?"

"I don't know about with her, but he was mixed up with a new one besides Patsy. Only it'll be Patsy," Hale said, and rubbed his shock of blond hair. "Hell, why am I glad? If he threw Patsy over, maybe I could get her, you know?"

"How are you sure? Did he tell you?" Shayne asked.

Hale shook his head. "No, not exactly, only I can tell about Tommy. He was kind of dreamy at first, then kind of excited. When I asked him who she was, he just sort of grinned and said this one he didn't share."

"When was that?"

"Couple of months ago. He got in deep—had it bad, I think. After a while he got kind of moody, sort of down and mad at the same time, you know? The way a guy gets when he's getting a hard time from a girl. I could tell she was giving him a real bad going over."

"What made you even think he went off with her somewhere?"

"Did I say I thought like that?" Hale said.

Shayne smiled. "You implied it."

Hale shrugged. "Okay, I guess I did."

"You want to tell me why?"

Hale hesitated. "Look, I like Patsy, you know? I mean, I figure Tommy comes back okay, so why hurt her? If I tell you, you don't

tell Patsy? I mean, you tell her you found out he's okay if you find him, but you keep the other chick out of it?"

"If that's what I find," Shayne said, and he meant it. Why hurt the girl if Tommy did come back? If Tommy didn't, knowing the reason why wouldn't help Patsy either.

"Okay," George Hale said. "Well, Tommy left work kind of early that night. He was all keyed up."

"You mean he was excited? As if he had a big date, maybe planned to take a trip?" Shayne said.

Hale rubbed his head. "Well, maybe. Anyway he was excited. I mean, he was real keyed up. He left early. I didn't have nothing better to do, so I worked some overtime. Tommy came back about eleven o'clock, and—"

"Eleven o'clock? You mean at night? What time did he leave work?"

"Around nine," Hale said. "We was working a kind of swing shift that night. Shop's on two shifts."

Shayne tugged slowly on his earlobe. Around nine! And Marko Kantor had been last seen alive around nine o'clock that night!

"Anyway," Hale went on, "Tommy come back about eleven. He was real excited this time. All shook up. He borrowed some loot, money, from me and beat it fast. I have never seen him since."

"How much did he borrow?"

"Fifty. It was payday. I had the money. He'd been hitting me regular, only not so big. He was my friend. I always got it back."

"Did he have his car?"

Hale nodded. "I think so."

"Did he say anything about where he was going?"

"No, nothing. He was in one hell of a hurry to make with the flying feet," Hale said.

Shayne tugged harder on his ear. It could be a boy out for a fling with a girl, but it did not sound like it. It sounded like a boy in trouble. He thanked the Hale boy, told him there would probably be more questions, and to be ready.

"And if you hear anything from or about Tommy, you call me. Here's my card; the number is on it," Shayne said.

"Sure thing," George Hale said, taking the card.

Shayne left without bothering with Pomeroy. He could hear angry voices in Pomeroy's office. Apparently the union had come. In the sun outside the building Shayne looked at his watch. Big Vic would not be in yet. There was just time for lunch, and maybe a talk with the elder Plancks who wanted people to think they knew where Tommy was.

IV

SHAYNE DROVE into Miami and had his lunch at *Mariachi's,* just off Flagler Street. He had a good

lunch, and it was past two when he got to the quiet and not-too-well-off street where the elder Plancks lived. The house was a simple tract house, ranch style, two bedrooms, not much land. A house like a thousand others in the general neighborhood.

As Mike Shayne parked out front in the shaded street and strode up the walk, he noticed a curtain move at a front window. He had a flitting view of a pale face; then the curtain dropped. The red-head knocked hard on the front door, although there was a bell. A good hard knock was more effective than a bell in scaring those inside and weakening resistance—a fact the Storm Troopers and the Gestapo and the Black-and-Tans in Ireland had learned a long time ago. If the elder Planck's were lying, a good scare might help.

A heavy, red-faced man opened the door. He looked at Shayne like a belligerent, ill-tempered bulldog. Behind him there was a scrawny woman in her fifties. She looked like she had a temper about as foul as her husband's, and probably sharper. The heavy man growled.

"What's with it?"

"Police," Shayne said, and leaned his weight on the door that the man still held. The man leaned in opposition. Shayne won. The man staggered slightly as Shayne pushed in as if by accident. "You Planck?"

"What about it?" the man said.

"What does he want, Al?" the woman snapped waspishly.

"How the hell do I know?" the man snarled over his shoulder. But his wife's question gave him an idea.

He glared at Shayne. "What the hell you want?"

"You have a son? Tommy? Well, I've got some questions. Do we talk here or downtown?"

The belligerent man wilted and so did his acid wife. Like a lot of not-too-bright, suspicious, bad-tempered people, the elder Plancks forgot to be suspicious about the right things. They stepped back sullenly and let Mike Shayne walk into their small but neat living room without asking him for his badge or credentials. Shayne was glad of that. The Plancks looked just smart enough to know that they did not have to talk to a private detective.

The heavy,red-faced man and his scrawny wife followed Shayne into the living room. Shayne sat down with a smile, and casually let Al Planck see his pistol in its shoulder holster, in case the surly man began to wonder about a badge. The gun should convince the man. It did. Planck looked at it, motioned to his wife, and they both sat down.

Shayne smiled disarmingly. "All right," he said, "now where is Tommy?"

The man was about to answer when his wife beat him to it.

"Is Tommy in trouble?" she asked.

Shayne was cautious. "That depends. If you tell me where he is, I'll let you know more."

Al Planck was cunning. "You tell us the trouble first."

"You know I can't tell you that, Planck," Shayne snapped. "But I'll tell you what I know. Tommy was mixed up with some girl, not Patsy Weller, He—"

Mrs. Planck snorted. "That one! Always hanging onto him! So she went to the police, the little witch! As if I'd tell her where Tommy was!"

Shayne looked at the woman. He began to wonder why Tommy hadn't committed murder sooner. But he let it pass and went on.

"He was excited the night he left work early. He borrowed money; he was agitated, he went off. He didn't tell his boss he was leaving. It looks to me like he left with the girl. Now I want you to tell me—"

"Money? How much did he borrow?" Al Planck asked.

"Fifty dollars," Shayne said.

Al Planck swore.

His wife was amazed. "On a girl? So that was what he was doing with all his money! A girl! You say it wasn't that Weller girl!"

"No," Shayne said.

"That dumb, stupid kid! When he gets back I'm going to give him something he'll never forget! Fifty bucks! It'll take him a month to make that in overtime! When I get my hands on him!"

Shayne listened. They were being honest, as if he wasn't there. They did not know where Tommy was. He began to feel cold again. He had hoped that they had told Patsy the truth after all. Now, it looked like the girl was right again. They did not know where their boy was. They simply did not want anyone to know they did not know!

"So you don't know where Tommy is," Shayne said.

Planck looked at the red-head, shrugged. "No. He took off. Four days ago. He come home, packed up a pack for campin', and jumped into that car he bought for himself. I didn't even know he was gone for a while. We was watchin' TV."

"Was he nervous, excited, maybe scared?" Shayne asked.

Planck shrugged. "How should I know. Like I said, we was watchin' TV. Well, I guess he was sort of hopped-up. I mean, he come in and out like his backside was burnin'."

The mother whined. "Not a word, you know? He just beat it and not a word where he was going. I figured he was in some kind of trouble, the dumb kid. A girl, huh? Now I get it. Mooning around here the past couple months. No money for me. Hell no. For some chippy!"

"You're not worried about him?" Shayne asked.

"Worried?" Planck said. "Sure

we're worried. We figured he was in some kind of trouble. So we don't want that to get around, do we? We figure we'll clam up. That damned Weller kid had to get nosy!"

"You haven't heard from Tommy?"

"Not a word, mister."

There was nothing more Shayne could ask, and he wanted to get out of the Planck house as fast as he could. He needed some fresh air.

Out in the street he lit a cigarette in the afternoon sun, and stood thinking before he went to his car. It was not looking too good. Of course, Tommy Planck could have been simply mixed up with some girl. But somehow Shayne felt that there had to be more than just a little trip with a girl to account for the descriptions of the boy's mood that night.

He was still thinking, and walking slowly toward his car, when he became aware of someone watching from the bushes in front of the house next to the Planck house.

Shayne lowered his left shoulder, bringing his shoulder holster forward and ready. He faced the bushes. He started to challenge, when the small voice whispered.

"Mr. Shayne? I don't want them to see me."

It was Patsy Weller. The pretty young blonde was hidden from the Planck house by the bushes. Shayne stepped to her and they stood out of sight from the Planck house.

"I only live down the street," Patsy said. "I saw you go by. Did they—?"

"No, you were right," Shayne said. "They don't know where he is. George Hale says he doesn't know. Marko Kantor had a lot of enemies, though. It's probably all right."

Patsy looked into his eyes. "You don't mean that. Not for sure."

"I mean it, Patsy," Shayne said gently. "But I'm not sure now that he's all right as far as you're concerned. Why didn't you tell me about the girl?"

"Girl?" Her eyes flickered away, did not look at Shayne.

Mike Shayne said drily, "Look, Patsy, I don't mind trying to put your mind at ease that Tommy hasn't killed anyone, but I don't like being conned into checking up on Tommy's love-life for you. You knew that there was another girl, didn't you?"

Her voice was little more than a whisper. "Yes. I mean I knew there was something. He—he told me there was someone. He said she was different; she excited him. He—he only talked about her once. He was a little drunk."

"And you think he's run off with her?"

"I did at first, Mr. Shayne. I cried. But, then, I read about this Marko Kantor, and I remembered. I think I'd know if it was with her he'd run off. I think he'd have told me or maybe George. Mr. Shayne,

if it was only a girl he'd have told his parents."

"I've seen them," Shayne said bluntly. "I don't think he'd tell them."

"He'd have gotten in touch with someone!"

"Maybe he will when the fire dies down, Patsy," Shayne said.

"No!" she said fiercely. "No! I know he's in some kind of trouble! I know it!"

"Patsy, do you want him to be a murderer or only with another woman?"

"Murderer?" the girl paled. "Tommy wouldn't murder anyone! I think maybe he knows who killed this Marko Kantor, or maybe he got mixed up with Kantor and the same people are after him, or maybe—"

The girl did not go on. There was a look of abject fear on her pretty face. Shayne did not have to hear words to know what she was thinking, what she had been about to say—maybe Tommy Planck had been murdered, too! It was possible.

"Patsy, I've got to check into this woman; she's shown up too many times. Did Tommy give you any clues as to who she was?"

"No," Patsy said.

"Nothing? Think hard, Patsy," Shayne insisted.

"No," the girl began, and then, "except that I got the idea that she was—older, you know? I never did know her name. He wouldn't tell me. Once he had a kind of compact. He didn't say it was hers, but I knew. It was monogrammed: *C.F.*"

Her voice had gone dead as she talked. Shayne could tell that for all her protestations, Patsy was not sure Tommy had not just run off with the woman. But the red-head did not have time to think much about the troubles of young love now. His mind was on something else: *C.F.*

And Marko Kantor's ex-wife was named Connie Faith!

"You go on home, Patsy," Shayne said. "I have more work to do."

It was nearly time to try Big Vic again, but first Shayne wanted to visit the bar where Marko Kantor had had the last of what had probably been many drinks.

V

THE BAR that had been in Lieutenant Bellow's report was one of the smaller bistros in Miami Beach—small and not exactly high class. It was named *The Red Porpoise,* and it was dim and all but deserted in the hot afternoon. Two fat men with New York pallors sat alone, drinking some frozen concoction. Three gaudy ladies of uncertain age but a lot of courage sat in gaudy finery, sipping stingers. The ladies were ignoring the stares of the fat New Yorkers. They were ignoring so pointedly that it was clear to

Shayne that they would soon be picked up by the fat boys.

Shayne strode to the bar, rested his panama on the bar, and ordered a sidecar from the scrawny little bartender. The ladies watched him almost as hungrily as the fat men watched the ladies. It was clear that the ladies had not seen such a hunk of fairly well preserved male in many a moon.

The scrawny barkeep did not smile. Shayne decided that the barkeep was one of those little men who had a personal peeve against anyone over one hundred thirty-five pounds with two arms.

"What's your name, bartender?" Shayne said.

"Who wants to know?" the scrawny citizen said snappily.

"I like to know who I give money to," Shayne said.

"Tony," the b rtender said, suddenly no longer angry at the size of Shayne. "You a cop?"

"Private," Shayne said. "Why?"

"I just like to know what I'm being paid for," the scrawny Tony grinned. Mike Shayne decided that his first impression of the man might have been wrong.

"Questions," Shayne said.

"I'm surprised," Tony grinned. "Questions is all a barkeep gets paid for besides booze and the names of dames. You don't look like a guy got to pay for names."

Shayne decided to end the witty banter. "There was a man in here four nights ago. Marko Kantor."

"Like I told the cops, there sure was. I know Marko a long time."

"You don't anymore," Shayne said.

"I'll cry next month," Tony said. "A louse. The cops got a hard one this time. I know guys who'd line up for the privilege."

"When did he come in that night?"

"Maybe eight o'clock."

"And leave?"

"Nine o'clock, on the nose. I know because nine is when my second man comes on to handle the night trade. He was walking in the door when Marko walked out. He's like a clock, my night man. He' wouldn't be a second late, he wouldn't give me a second more time than I pay for."

"How did Marko act?"

Tony grinned. "You're good. The cops forgot to ask me that. I tell you how he acted—like a guy with business on his mind. Like he

had an appointment at nine o'clock. He must have looked at my clock up on the wall twenty times in the hour he was in here."

"Was he sober?"

Tony scratched his miniature chin. "Well, that's a hard one. Marko held the gargle good. He'd had maybe five big ones, drank them fast like he was nervous. But with Marko that isn't so much. It would depend on how much he'd had before he came here."

"What do you think?" Shayne said.

"Me? Well, I'd say he was in the bag but not too far. I mean, he could walk and drive okay, only maybe he wasn't so quick."

Shayne nodded. It figured that Marko Kantor, a habitual criminal and, therefore, habitually nervous and wary, would have to have been a little off his best to have been shot from so close and with his own gun.

"He was alone the whole time?" Shayne asked.

"In here he was," Tony the bartender said.

"In here?" Shayne snapped. "You mean there was someone somewhere else?"

Tony scratched his head. "Tell you the truth, I ain't sure, but I think there was someone."

"Where?" Shayne said quickly.

Tony held up a small, hairy hand. "Let me tell it. It was like this: I was working, but kind of watching the clock myself, because the crowd come in early that night and I was hoping maybe my night man for once in his life comes early, you know? So, I was working, watching the clock. The place was jammed; I was watching the door too.

"Well, I'm looking towards the door and I think I see my night man. Only then I see it ain't, cause he don't come in. I mean, I see this person standing out in front of the door. Then I see it's a dame, see? Well, I watch her maybe a half minute. It looks like she's giving someone inside the high sign. I look quick, and just right then Marko pays up and heads for the door. It's nine o'clock on the nose.

"Marko and my night man, they pass right inside the door. Marko goes out. I figure I looked away maybe a few seconds to give my night guy the hurry-up because the place is so crowded. Then I looks back. I don't see the dame or Marko.

"I got maybe just a little curious, it being a louse like Marko, so I goes over by the window.

"Marko's car is still out there. It ain't moving. Then it takes off. It goes under a street light. I ain't one-hundred percent, sure but I think I saw the dame in the car with Marko. I remember thinking I was real sorry for that dame if she was so hard-up she had to go with Marko."

"A woman," Shayne grunted.

A woman with Marko after he was in the bar. It might mean the

woman was the last to see him alive. As far as Shayne knew, no woman had come forward to identify or even ask about Marko. He took out a ten dollar bill and laid it on the bar. Tony picked it up with a grin.

"Thanks, friend. Any time," Tony said.

"Thanks for the words," Shayne said.

He turned and strode to the rear of the saloon where the telephone booths were. Inside a booth, he dialed Miami police headquarters and asked for Lieutenant Bellow. The lieutenant was in his office. Bellow sounded even more morose than he had been earlier.

"So far, so bad," Bellow said. "He was a monk the last six months, damn him. I found seven times he went to gambling joints but he lost every time. Small, but a loser. No women so far."

"What about the body?" Shayne said. "Anyone come to look at it? Anyone come forward with any clues?"

"No, no one," Bellow said, and then, because Bellow was no fool, "Are you just making words, Mike, or do you have a reason to think someone might show up? I'm pretty busy right now."

"A hunch," Shayne said into the black instrument in the silence of the booth. "No more, Lieutenant. Did you know that Kantor may have been with a woman after nine o'clock?"

Bellow swore. "Where'd you get that?"

"You didn't know?"

"No, damn it. Come on, Mike, where did you pick up that little tidbit?"

"The Red Porpoise," Shayne said.

Bellow swore again. "I'll have Tony's hide."

"No, you probably didn't ask the right question," Shayne said. He did not mention the ten dollars. "Cheap saloon barmen are allergic to volunteering information to the police, especially when they're only guessing."

"Is he guessing, Mike?"

"A good guess, I think," Shayne said. "The trouble is it doesn't prove anything. Time of death was anywhere between nine and midnight, right? So he met a woman. She probably was just a pick-up for the night."

"At least she's one more hope for a lead," Bellow said from the far end of the phone. Shayne could almost see the lieutenant thinking. "We'll work harder on the dame angle. Still, you're probably right; we've turned up no steadies for Marko. She was probably a one-nighter, and I can guess our chances of finding her now that she knows her boy is dead. She'll fade into the trees."

"I thought I'd let you know," Shayne said.

"Thanks, Mike. You want to tell me anything else?"

"When I know," Shayne said.

The red-head hung up and lit a cigarette in the booth. The woman could mean nothing, or she could mean a lot. What if it had been Connie Faith? What if Connie Faith were the woman young Tommy was interested in? Could the boy have killed in a fit of jealousy?

But if that were the case, where was the ex-wife now?

Shayne left the booth and nodded to Tony as he passed. Out in the sunny street, he decided it was about time to pay Big Vic Cartwright a visit. He walked to his car still thinking about Marko Kantor ad Tommy Planck. It was a mistake Mike Shayne rarely made, to be so busy thinking that his guard was down.

He bent to get into his car, and the man jammed a gun into his back.

"Get in. Don't turn around. Behind the wheel. Look straight ahead."

Shayne did as he was told. He could see that there was a man in the back seat already, a man with his face down and hidden. Behind the wheel, Shayne started the car. The rearview mirror was turned down.

"Use your outside mirror, and just watch the road, peeper," the first man said. "Drive straight out. We'll tell you when to turn and when to stop."

Shayne drove.

VI

SHAYNE DROVE for some time. He left the busier parts of Miami Beach and came into more deserted streets. The man told him to turn on a side street. He turned.

"Pull up," the man said.

Shayne pulled up.

"Sit still."

Shayne sat. Hands touched his shoulder, and a bag was dropped over his head. Then the hands went away. The man who had not spoken now spoke quietly. Shayne heard the flick of a cigarette lighter. A creaking in his back seat. The two men were making themselves comfortable.

"Okay, Shayne. You can move, do anything you like except take that bag off."

"Thanks " Shayne said.

"Don't mention it," the second man said. "Now, let's get down to a little business. Just what do you want to find out about Marko for?"

"Marko?" Shayne said.

A heavy hand slapped his face hard through the bag.

"Don't get smart, peeper," the voice of the first man said.

Shayne was sorting them out. The first man was the one who had come up behind him with the gun. From where the gun and jabbed him he judged the first man to be tall and heavy, a big man with muscles. The first man's voice was hoarse, like the voice of an ex-prizefighter. It would be the

ex-prizefighter who had slapped him, issued the warning.

"Shayne, don't push us," the second man said. "Okay?"

The voice of the second man was lighter, smoother. It was far from educated or even intelligent, but it had a certain veneer that the ex-pug lacked. From the brief glimpse he had had of the second man Shayne judged him to be smaller, but not thin. A man of average height and build. But it was clear that the second man was the leader. The ex-pug was the muscle.

"All right, Shayne," the leader said. "What are you nosing around after Marko for? You're not a cop. You got to have a reason, a paying client or something in it for you? What do you think you know?"

"Not much," Shayne said, "if I let two punks like you put the arm on me so easy.

This time it was a fist that hit his mouth under the bag. A big fist. The ex-pug had been at least a light-heavyweight. He felt blood in his mouth.

"Talk, Shayne," the leader said.

"Talk about what? I've got a client thinks Marko maybe got his daughter on the wrong track. Okay?"

The ex-pug croaked a laugh from somewhere outside the bag over Shayne's head. "That sounds sure like Marko."

The leader was not so easily satisfied. "His daughter, huh? You can do better. Who's the client and who's the daughter?"

"You know I can't—"

The fist hit again. There was more blood. Shayne's tongue felt a loosened tooth. And he knew that the big ex-pug was hitting lightly.

"Come on, Shayne," the leader said. "You were asking about who Marko was maybe with that night. Now what do you know?"

"Go to hell," Shayne said from under the bag.

He was thinking hard. If he could get them mad enough, he might be able to get the bag off and reach the automatic he always kept clipped to the top of his sun visor above the windshield. It was a slim hope, but it was the best he had.

It faded. There was no fist this time. There was, instead, a brief silence. Then there were whispered words. Shayne sensed that his two abductors were getting nervous. He had already judged them as small-time, a long way from masterminds. At last, the leader spoke.

"All right, Shayne. We ain't out to play games with you. We'll tell you what we know and what we want. Marko had himself a little plan, it looks like. Okay, only it went wrong, see? Marko got his. The trouble is, we ain't got ours, see? Now what we want to know is where the kid is hiding out. That's all. Now, we figure you got to know something or you wouldn't be out to track Marko. We figure you know about the kid."

Shayne felt very cold under the bag. They could only mean Tommy Planck, and that meant that these two punks knew that Tommy and Marko had been involved. The question was how much did they know? How much could he tell them?

"What kid?" Shayne said.

"How should I know?" the leader said. "Tommy something. Look, we know all about it, Shayne. Now all we want is to find the kid, see?"

"Yes," Shayne said, "I see. You want to find the kid. The trouble is, so do I."

There was a short silence.

"You what?" the leader said.

"I'm looking for the damned kid, too. I—"

The fist hit him. The ex-pug growled.

"Talk straight, Shayne. Who looks for a punk kid? You're working with the kid, huh? You know where—"

"Shut up!" the leader snapped.

There was another silence outside the bag. Shayne tried to hear but they were whispering too low. There seemed to be a small argument. Then only the leader was talking. They were obviously nervous.

"Okay, Shayne," the leader said. "Maybe you're leveling and maybe you're not. Just one thing—don't get in our way, you hear? You don't want to take a swim like Marko, right?"

"Tell me why you want the kid," Shayne began, "and maybe we can work—"

It was a blackjack that hit him. He felt it, felt his skull bend as it hit, and then he was feeling nothing else.

When Mike Shayne woke up he wondered at first why it was so dark. How long had he been out? It was night, and he must have been out for hours. A blackjack should not knock a man out for that long. And where was he?

He could see nothing. He felt that he was lying on a couch in some big room. Something hard was pressed against his head. In the distance he heard automobiles passing. There seemed to be people walking a long way off. He tried to move, but something seemed to be holding him down.

He raised his head and hit a hard object. He blinked to clear his head and see if he could see something in the room. He still saw nothing. Then he felt the strange sensation on his eyes, something rubbed against his eyelids. Something rough and loose.

Shayne began to laugh.

He knew where he was.

All at once everything moved into focus. The hard object he had hit was the dashboard. The thing pressing against him was the steering wheel. The couch was the front seat of his car. The traffic was on the main street of the Beach. And the reason for the darkness was that the bag was still over his head.

He sat up carefully and reached to take the bag off his head. Outside the car the sun was still high. He could not have been out for more than a few minutes, just enough time for his two friends to make their escape. Some people passed on the side street. They looked curiously at him. He touched his head and felt blood.

He turned down the rearview mirror and looked at himself. His mouth was swollen and there was some blood on his lip. There was blood still wet on his forehead, and where he had been sapped was soft and painful. A lump was growing already. He felt his teeth, but there was only the one loose tooth.

He took out a cigarette, lit it, and sat back in the front seat. There were few people on the street, and if any had passed while he was out they would not have seen him lying there on the front seat. He smoked to get all his strength back. His head throbbed, but he had been hit hard.

Shayne smoked and thought about the two men. Small-time hoods. Just the type who would have been involved with Marko Kantor. They were looking for Tommy Planck. Why? Because they wanted something. What? To avenge the death of Marko? It was possible. Shayne did not think that Tommy would fare well if the two men found him.

He sighed and tugged slowly on his left earlobe as he smoked in the car on the quiet Miami Beach street. They had connected Tommy to Marko. It was not a surprise. Every step of the way on the trail of Tommy Planck he had come up with a strong hint that Patsy Weller's fears were justified. Now there was the final proof—friends of Marko Kantor also knew of Tommy.

The only question was, what was the connection.

Because Marko and Tommy had known each other for some reason, did not mean Tommy had killed Marko. It did not mean that the killer of Marko had also killed Tommy. It did not mean that the killer of Marko was looking for Tommy. It did not mean that Tommy Planck was in trouble. Not necessarily. But it could very easily mean all of those things.

Shayne threw his cigarette out the window and started the car. First he would get his head patched. Then it was really time to talk to Big Vic Cartwright.

VII

SHAYNE LEFT his car in front of the Bank of Bay Biscayne Building on Flagler Street. His panama perched on the bandage that swathed his head. Some passers-by stared, giggled. Shayne bowed to them as he went into the building and rode up to the fifth floor. The small reception room was identified as *Cartwright Associates.*

"Shayne to see Mr. Cartwright," he said to the blonde who manicured her bloody nails at the reception desk.

"Mr. Cartwright is out of—"

"Whoa! I said Mike Shayne. I was told to come and find out when Mr. Cartwright will possibly be here," Shayne said.

The girl jumped as if shot. She bent over a list on her desk. Then she began dialing a telephone fast. She spoke very low, listened, and then turned to Mike Shayne. Obviously the blonde was both awed and frightened by what she knew of Big Vic Cartwright. She would have run screaming if she had known as much as Shayne knew about Big Vic.

"Second door on your right," she said. "Knock. It's an office."

Shayne walked to the second door. It was unmarked, showed no evidence of an office behind it. It looked like the door to some storage closet. It even had a pencil sharpener attached to it to enhance the effect of some unimportant door. Shayne knocked.

"Okay," a strong voice said.

Shayne entered what turned out to be a large office behind the unprepossessing door. Big Vic Cartwright sat behind his massive desk with its rows of telephones and its hundred hidden devices for communication and control of his vast network of enterprises. The big gambling czar was almost as massive as the desk. Big Vic grinned at Shayne.

"I don't like to see you, Mike—You're the only guy I know that can take me," Vic said.

"That'll be the day, Vic," Shayne said.

The office was bright and cheerful—and guarded better than the Berlin Wall with hidden guards no one would ever see until he made a false move. Big Vic was the boss of more illegal operations than any other single man in Miami, or Florida, or probably anywhere outside New York.

But the big gambler played it straight and as honest as it was possible to be in a dishonest world. Both Vic and Shayne knew that if Shayne ever got in Vic's way, Shayne could expect no favors; and they both knew that if Vic ever gave Shayne a reason to go against

him, then Vic would have to defend himself.

"What's the problem, Mike?" Big Vic said.

Shayne sat down in a high-backed leather arm chair that faced Big Vic across the desk. The red-head rubbed his gaunt chin.

"I'm not sure this is something you can talk about all the way, Vic, but give me what you can, okay?"

Big Vic watched Shayne levelly. "You know the rules, Mike. If I can tell you what you want without breaking my rules I will."

Shayne nodded, leaned forward. "The man's dead. He may have some associates who aren't dead. They're looking for the guy they think killed their friend. There's a woman, too. She was the dead man's ex-wife; She may be mixed up in the deal. All I want is some background on the last six months of the dead guy, the names of his friends and maybe something about the woman."

Big Vic frowned. "It doesn't sound like a right deal this time, Mike. It sounds like stooling."

"I won't use any of it except to get me closer," Shayne said.

"You're asking me to finger a man, Mike."

"No, I don't think so," Shayne said slowly. "I don't think you can finger anyone in this. I just need background, something to glue some ideas together."

Big Vic thought for a time. He absently reached into his cigar humidor and took out two of his special cigars. He handed one to Shayne. Both men lit the cigars, blew smoke. At last Big Vic nodded slowly.

"What's the name?"

"Marko Kantor," Shayne said.

Big Vic stared, held his cigar suspended like a frozen wand in the silence. Then the big gambling czar began to laugh. Tears streamed down Big Vic's face. He choked on his cigar smoke and waved the cigar to tell Shayne to wait, he was okay. The big gambler got his breath back.

"Marko! God, why didn't you say so? Nobody owes that louse anything," Big Vic said, and then he calmed, eyed Shayne. "Not that I'll finger even Marko's friends, you understand, but I'll do what I can."

Shayne nodded. "That's all I want, Vic."

Big Vic shook his head. "You mean someone is actually out to catch the guy who killed Marko? That doesn't seem right at all. The guy should get a medal. How do you figure in it?"

Shayne explained what he could about Tommy Planck to Big Vic. The gambling boss listened carefully. When Shayne had finished, Vic chewed on his cigar, blew smoke studied the ash of the elegant cigar.

"You think this kid knocked off Marko?"

"I don't know," Shayne said.

"Where's the motive?" Vic said.

"That's what I want from you, a possible motive. Maybe Tommy killed him, and maybe someone else killed Marko and Tommy, and maybe the killer got Marko but not Tommy yet. One way or the other I've got to dig it out. What I need is a real connection."

Big Vic thought a while. "I can't place any, Mike."

"Can you just tell me why Marko was so quiet these last months? What was he up to? Was he involved in any capers?"

Big Vic was very thoughtful. The gambling boss seemed to be considering the ethics of the matter from all angles. The problem, Shayne knew, was simple: Did Big Vic owe loyalty to the men involved, or was he required by his code to honor their rights to protection. Was he bound to them in any way, by the code of his world, even though he did not know them?

"Okay, Mike, I'm clean on this one. Armed robbery isn't in my league."

"Armed robbery?" Shayne snapped.

Big Vic nodded. "I can't tell you where or when, but I can tell you this: Marko and two of his best buddies, which means two guys who didn't hate him too much, knocked off a jewelry store. A pretty big haul. They planned it good. Even Marko kept clean while they were mapping it out."

"Two buddies?" Shayne said.

"There was some word about a fourth guy, maybe a driver. It happened not too long ago—clean haul, not in Miami. The smart boys figured they had a problem, though—how to get the stuff and themselves, away safe. Marko is a pretty well-known boy. If he tried to leave the country, the cops would smell a stink for a lot of miles."

"Would two of his buddies be a big ex-pug and a smaller guy with a kind of smooth voice?" Shayne said.

Vic smiled. "You've met them. Yeh, that sounds like the two. The big pug is Roy Pace, the smoothie is Turk Jacks. Both have about fifty aliases. They're marked men, too. They don't have a lot of brains but they can be mean. They worked with Marko on bunco schemes before he went to Atlanta."

"But there was talk of a fourth man?"

Vic nodded. "Yeh. Name unknown, maybe a new man. It figures he would be the driver if they used one."

"The getaway man, maybe?" Shayne said.

"Those boys could sure have used one," Big Vic said.

Shayne tugged on his earlobe. The red-head was puzzled. No one had mentioned a possible involvement of Tommy Planck in any crime. But the boy did leave

town on camping and hunting trips—and recently he had not always told Patsy Weller where he was going or when. On the other hand, it did not seem logical that Marko Kantor would not have some plan for getting clear with his loot. And he had come to Miami? Was Tommy connected somehow to the getaway? Which could explain why Turk and Roy wanted the boy.

"Vic, I can't see those boys pulling a job and not having a getaway plan," Shayne said.

Vic smiled. "You're too smart. Sure, Marko must have had some plan. I couldn't say what, except there was talk about a woman, Connie Faith."

"His ex-wife!" Shayne said.

"You've been working. Yeh, she's his ex-wife. Only she was more than a wife. She worked with him on some bunco schemes. She was just a kid then, before he went to Atlanta. She's been straight since, only—"

"Only?"

Vic shrugged. "She's an airline hostess on a kind of small airline runs to Puerto Rico out of here."

"Hostess?" Shayne said. "Puerto Rico doesn't require any papers to go. Once in Puerto Rico, he might get out easy."

"Yeh, and a hostess maybe would know how to beat Customs easy," Vic said.

"Where do I find her Vic?"

Big Vic smoked for a time in the silence of the office. Then he looked at his cigar speculatively.

"Try her office, *Flying Shark Lines*. I hear she sometimes uses another name: Connie Frank."

Shayne stood up. "Thanks, Vic."

"For what? You got nothing from me, Mike."

"No, I didn't."

"You owe me a favor," Vic said.

"You name the time."

"I will," Vic said.

Shayne left the big gambling czar moodily studying his cigar. Vic was a strange man. Shayne knew that the big man was as honest as they came, yet he was outside the law. The way a man grew was not always his fault, not in his control. Most of the time a man did not control his life; it just happened.

Big Vic had become a gambler. Even Vic could probably not tell you just exactly how it had happened, where it had begun. When a man looked back, it usually seemed like there was nothing else that could have happened.

In the street again, Mike Shayne went to his car and drove to the offices of *Flying Shark Airlines*.

VIII

CONNIE FAITH, alias Connie Frank, lived in a good bungalow-type house in an open area of the city. The bungalow, in the late

evening sun, was neat and clean and set among many trees on a park-like grounds where other bungalows were visible among the trees. In places the trees were very thick, the vegetation lush and tropical. The open areas were smooth green lawns and very well kept.

Shayne left his car in the driveway and walked in the late sun up the walk to the small porch of the bungalow. There were voices inside the bungalow. As Shayne put his foot on the first step they stopped. Shayne listened carefully. There was no sound as he stood in front of the door and raised his fist to knock.

The door jerked open before he could knock.

Shayne jumped back and to his right, his left shoulder down, his big hand snaking for the pistol in the holster beneath his left shoulder.

The voice was hard but not menacing.

"All right, Mike; you want to tell me about Tommy Planck now?"

Shayne straightened up. Lieutenant Bellow stood in the open doorway. Shayne could see some of Bellow's men behind him. One had his gun drawn. Shayne realized that from the house they could not have seen who was coming, only that a man was coming. The vines that festooned the small porch were too thick.

"You seem to know already, Lieutenant," Shayne said.

"No thanks to you! Damn it, Mike, you shouldn't hold out!"

"I didn't hold out. I had nothing except a kid who was missing," Shayne said. "That's about all I've still got. It looks like maybe you've got more?"

"I've got a lot more, Mike."

Bellow stepped aside and Shayne walked into the cottage. There were three of Bellow's men. They had holstered their guns, and now they stood around watching Shayne. Shayne was not watching them. He was watching the other two people in the room.

One was a man of stocky build and average height. He had dark black hair going grey at the temple. His hands that opened and closed nervously as he sat were long and fine, good hands. He had pale blue eyes, and his face was heavily tanned as if he spent much time in the sun. His eyes were set in deep creases at the corners; the eyes of a man who looks into distances a great deal, who looks, perhaps, into the sun. The reason for the eyes was obvious, the man wore the uniform of an airline pilot.

The woman was small and very pretty. Not beautiful in the way that a woman is beautiful, but pretty as a girl is pretty. She had small features, very even and delicate, and big brown eyes, and she held her chin high. She had a

good small body. She wore the uniform of an airline hostess, and her eyes showed that she had been crying. She looked about twenty but Shayne guessed that she was perhaps twenty-six.

She was just the exact type to turn the head of a nineteen-year-old boy. Shayne had no doubt that he was looking at Connie Faith, and that he was also looking at the other woman in Tommy Planck's young life.

"Mike Shayne, Miss Connie Faith and Captain Adam Bishop. Miss Faith is—"

"The ex-Mrs. Kantor," Shayne said. "Yeh, I know. She's also Miss Frank, it seems."

The woman looked at Shayne. "Mr. Shayne, if you had been once married to Marko Kantor, you'd want to use other names, too."

The captain bristled. "Who is this guy, Lieutenant?"

"Shayne is a private detective," Bellow said.

"Do we need him, too?" Captain Bishop snapped.

"I think he has a right to be here, Bishop," Bellow said. "If I'm right, Shayne is working for the boy."

"Yeah," Shayne said, "I'm working for the boy. I'm trying to find the boy. Where is he, Miss Faith?"

The pretty woman shook her head. "I don't know, Mr. Shayne. I really don't."

"Then—" Shayne began.

Bellow interrupted him. "You better hear her tell it, Shayne. You want to start again from the beginning, Miss Faith?"

The woman had tears in her eyes. "Do I have to?"

Bellow nodded. "I want to hear it again and Shayne has a right to hear it."

Captain Bishop spoke softly. "Go ahead, Connie."

The pretty woman seemed to shudder as she took a deep breath. She looked around at all of them. "It was awful, so awful. We only meant—" She stopped, shivered again, tried to smile. "Tommy is a nice boy. So young, but he wouldn't listen to me. We met at the airport. He used to like to come around. One day I noticed him and asked him if he wanted to see the jet. He did. I don't know—perhaps I was wrong, but I liked him, I really did."

She took another deep breath. "Maybe it was just that I was lonely."

Shayne raised a ragged red eyebrow. Bellow watched the woman. Shayne looked at Captain Bishop. The pilot seemed undisturbed. It was clear that Miss Faith was saying that she and the captain were no more than fellow employees of the same air line. The woman saw Shayne's raised eyebrow.

"Tommy is quite big for his age, Mr. Shayne. I gather you never saw him? He's over six feet tall, and he's husky. He looks older. Oh, I knew he was younger than me, but I didn't know how much younger. I thought he was in his early twenties. We weren't such a bad match. Anyway, whatever it was, I invited him to have coffee with me after I showed him the jet."

She sighed. "He asked me for a date. I was alone—why not? He took me to dinner. You know, it's funny, but young boys are the best dates in the world. They're eager, anxious, attentive, and they worship a girl, an older girl. They take you places their older brothers would never spend the money on. They treat a girl very right, and they want what you all want but they don't push it so hard, and they want you to want them.

"Well, we got to know each other pretty well. Oh, I knew he had another girl, a real girl. I planned to turn him loose soon. It was hard, though. He's a hell of a nice kid, and I've had my share of rotten men. Believe me, with the men I get, it was real hard to turn Tommy loose. But I would have. I mean it. He was too young, too eager, I couldn't ruin him. I—"

The woman burst into tears. Mike Shayne was studying her very closely. She was either a great actress or telling it straight. The captain was playing it straight too, from the look of him. It was hard for Shayne to imagine that Connie Faith would have preferred a nineteen-year-old boy to the captain, no matter how well set up and older-looking the boy was, but Bishop was acting the part of no more than a close professional friend to perfection.

The woman sobbed. "But I have ruined him, haven't I? I've ruined his life! I didn't know what to do, what to tell him. I thought no one would find out. I thought if he hid he'd be safe. I—"

Bellow was gentle but firm. "Go on with the story, Miss Faith. I want to get it all clear again. It's important."

Connie Faith nodded, shuddered again. "I'd planned to turn him loose, send him back to his real girl over a month ago. Then Marko showed up after all these years! He had to find me, show up again, badger me! I had to have someone, just someone. Somehow, I couldn't let Tommy go then. Marko would come

around, and after he went I'd call Tommy, just to feel clean again."

She looked at them, her lips curled as if tasting something horrible. "Do you know Marko? Did you know him? Oh, let me tell you about Marko Kantor. I was a kid, sixteen, when I married him. Oh, he could dazzle if he put his mind to it. Then I found out what he did for a living, if you can call it living and that was all I wanted. I tried to get out, but could I? No, not from Marko. The things he did to me—hit me, kicked me, locked me in rooms, threatened to kill me if I ever tried to leave.

"I think he would have too. But I got lucky then. He was finally picked up on a charge that stuck. A Federal rap, and he went off to Atlanta. I divorced him. I came down here to try to start again. I wasn't even twenty-one. Well, I did start again. I learned, I studied. I got to be a hostess on the airline.

"Even though I had gone back to my maiden name, I wasn't sure about Marko, so I changed my name at the airline. It's only a small airline. I didn't dare have a big one because they might check and find out about Marko. They don't take married women, and they wouldn't take the ex-wife of a convict. So I took the *Flying Shark Line*. I figured I was safe."

She laughed. "No one is safe from Marko. No one was! I keep forgetting he's dead! Oh, I'm glad he's dead. He wouldn't leave me alone. No, he kept coming around, chasing, threatening me! He was going to tell the airline. He was going to beat me up. He was going to beat up Tommy unless I agreed to come back to him. He was going to go to Puerto Rico and we were going to get back together. I told him I'd never get back with him! But he wouldn't listen. No, not Marko! He laughed, he kept calling, hounding me, threatening!"

She stopped. Her chest was heaving. She looked at all the men who watched her. She passed her hands across her eyes.

"I only wanted Tommy to stop him hounding me. Stop him. Scare him away. Marko was always a coward. I just wanted Tommy to make him stop. I—I didn't want Tommy to kill him!"

Shayne felt his stomach sink all the way. All he could seem to think of now was how Patsy Weller's face would look with tears in her blue eyes.

IX

THE SMALL living room of the cottage was silent for a long minute while Connie Faith tried to regain her composure. Captain Bishop looked both sympathetic and gloomy. The pilot let his deep-set, wind-creased eyes look around the room.

"I say the boy should be con-

gratulated!" Bishop said. "I wish Connie had come to me about that louse. I'd have taken care of him."

Shayne watched the woman. "How did Tommy kill him? He was shot with his own gun, close up. How—"

Bellow stopped Shayne with a motion of his hand. The lieutenant nodded gently to the woman. "Go on with the rest of it, Miss Faith. All the details, okay?"

The woman nodded. "Of course, Lieutenant. I'm sorry. It's just that I hate Marko almost as much dead as alive, after what happened." She laughed a short, bitter laugh. "He couldn't even die without hurting someone!"

"All right, Connie," Captain Bishop said. "I just wish you had come to me."

"So do I," Connie Faith said. "You would have been ready for his tricks."

"Just the details, Miss Faith," Bellow said.

"The details," the woman said. "What details are there? I was stupid. I've done more damage than Marko! Poor Tommy, he was only trying to help me. I wish I hadn't asked him, and I know I shouldn't have let him run away. You won't hold it against him Lieutenant, that he ran?"

"That depends, Miss Faith."

She nodded. "Well, I couldn't stand it any longer, Marko hounding me, threatening me. Tommy saw that I was worried, scared. He asked me about it. I brushed him off for a while, but then Marko gave me such a bad time one day that I just had to tell someone. I told Tommy. I never saw a man get so pale or angry. I guess it was because he was just a kid.

"Kids feel things more, you know? I mean, when you grow up all the way you learn that the world stinks, that nobody does nothing for anybody. People bleed you for all they can get out of you; that's the way it is. Not for Tommy. He was thinking of me. Oh sure, he was thinking of himself, too. If he defends me maybe he gets me. Sure, but it was really me he was out to help.

"Well, a while passed. You know how it is. Then about five days ago Marko came after me again. This time he hit me. He was wild. He said we had to get married again. If we didn't he'd tell all about me, and he'd beat me up in the bargain. And he meant a beating. The way he looked I was afraid he'd maybe kill me. He was scared about something, I could tell. He—"

Shayne said, "Scared of what?"

"I don't know, Mr. Shayne. With Marko it could have been almost anything: money he owed some hard guys; someone's husband; the cops. Anything."

"You don't know what it was?"

"No," the woman said.

"Go on " Shayne said.

She shrugged. "I was really

scared. I told Tommy. He said he'd handle it. I tried to talk him out of it, only he said he could handle a punk like that. Well, Marko was a real yellow bum; Tommy was a lot bigger. Tommy said he could take care of himself. Marko'd be surprised. So I said okay. I figured that if Marko got a going over he'd lay off me."

She laughed again, a bitter laugh. "I was thinking of myself, what else? I'm no better than anyone else. I knew Marko was a dangerous rat. I told myself the kid was big enough. I told myself Marko'd fold up. I guess I was crazy. Anyway, I told the kid okay, and I told Marko to come around here. He said he didn't come after no dame, I should meet him at *The Red Porpoise*. We'd drive over here.

"He said I should meet him at nine o'clock. Tommy couldn't get out here until ten o'clock. I didn't want Marko to get ideas, and I didn't want him to insist on the time, so I agreed to meet him at nine o'clock. When we were in the car, I told him I had some business at the office. He was mad, but he was real anxious too, so he waited outside the office. At ten o'clock I came out and we drove over here.

"It was a real dark night, you remember? Well, we got out in the driveway and started up toward the bungalow. Tommy was waiting. He stepped right up to Marko. I tell you, he's a kid with real guts, believe me. He walked right out of the bushes and told Marko that if he didn't leave me alone, he'd beat him to a pulp.

" 'Get right out of Miami, Kantor,' " Tommy said.

"Marko laughed at him 'Get out of my way, kid.' "

" 'You come around once more, just once, and you get more of this,' Tommy said, and he hit Marko right on the mouth.

"Marko got up, surprised, mad as all hell. He jumped on Tommy. It was that he could see Tommy was just a kid. If it had been a man, Marko'd have run. Tommy was bigger though, and he could fight. One maybe two minutes passed. Tommy knocked him down twice more. Marko was bleeding. Then I saw it, that look in his eye. He pulled the gun.

"I almost fainted. Marko didn't carry a gun most of the time, too scared to risk it. I guess he was in some trouble so had the gun with him, and it was that Tommy was just a kid. That made Marko really crazy, that a kid was beating him up. So he pulled the gun. I don't know, maybe he only wanted to scare Tommy.

"But Tommy saw the gun and when Marko tried to get up with it, Tommy jumped on him. Marko was up. They struggled. Tommy had hold of Marko's wrist. Like I said, it was real dark. They was over near the bushes. They was

close together, fighting for the gun. They—"

She stopped, and then looked at everyone. "It went off. I mean, the gun just went off. I screamed. I guess Tommy thought I'd been hit. He let go of Marko and came running. I was okay. Then we saw Marko. He was just standing there. The gun was on the ground; we found it later. Marko stood there, and then he turned and sort of staggered off into the bushes.

"It was horrible. We just stared. The way Marko staggered we knew he'd been hit. He vanished into the bushes. We waited. Then I told Tommy he better go and see. So he went after Marko. He found him inside the bushes, in a kind of open space under some trees. He was dead, shot right in the chest."

She blinked at them all. "Marko was dead!"

There was a silence in the room. Shayne shook his head. Tommy Planck, a more-or-less decent kid, falls for a woman too old for him, a woman with a past, and gets mixed up in a killing. Tommy wanted a dazzling older woman, and he got a killing instead. At least it was self-defense, unless they wanted to make a case for mansalughter-two—homicide while in a fight.

Marko had the gun. Marko was a louse and a danger. Marko had threatened a woman. But Tommy had started the fight!

Shayne watched the woman. "What then?"

"Tommy got scared. So did I. There he was, Marko, dead right next to my house. I could just see it in the papers. And then there was Tommy. You don't live around Marko long before you know a lot about the law," she said bitterly. "It was a fight, and Tommy started it. I mean, I could say Marko started it—we both could—but the cops aren't so dumb. I know what a man can get for killing another man, even accidentally in a fight. Right, Lieutenant?"

Bellow nodded. "It would be up to the jury and the judge, but it could be pretty bad. He'll have to take his chances. You'll have to testify for him."

"I know, sure" Connie Faith said. "I knew at the time. We both did. It meant Marko'd got me, right? Oh, I know, we weren't thinking clear. Who could?" There was Marko dead. I was scared, and I saw my whole new life down the drain again. Tommy was scared, and he'd killed a man. He was nineteen, and he'd killed a man!"

She seemed to stare at nothing at all in the room where the cold eyes of the police probed her. Shayne watched her and he saw the scene in the dark night among the shadowed trees as well as if he had been there. The small woman, young and yet so old, so old be-

fore her time. The boy, big and strong and in love, but a good kid who had just killed a man. The fear, the panic! Marko staggering off into the bushes, stumbling through the bushes as his blood poured out his life, falling down in the tiny clearing among the dark trees, dying.

Then the two, who had hoped only to frighten, faced with death! Fear everywere. Then the silence, the empty night, and a certain hope. After all, who knew Marko Kantor had come there? Who could connect Tommy Planck and Marko? Who would care about the death, the disappearance, of Marko Kantor?

" 'Tommy, who has to know?' I said," Connie Faith said to all the men in the room. "That was what I said. It was all we needed. Who did have to know? Oh, how stupid you can be! It was so easy to trace me, to figure it out. And Mr. Shayne, he came the other way, through Tommy, but he's here, too. It seemed so simple that night.

"Tommy carried Marko to his own car. I drove Marko's car. We went to the bay. Tommy dropped Marko in, weighted down with his jack and tire chains—we thought it would be like a gang killing if he was ever found. We put his gun back in his pocket. Then we drove Marko's car to another part of the bay and ran it in. After that I went home. Tommy ran.

"I don't know; I knew he shouldn't run, but he was afraid. He said he had to get away, hide for a while. I don't know where he went; he said it was better I didn't know. Then I read about the body being found, and I've been waiting ever since. In a way I'm glad it's over."

She looked at them all. "It—it was self-defense! Marko pulled that gun. Tommy had to try to save himself. It's just self-defense!"

"That is up to a jury, Miss Faith," Bellow said. "First it's up to the district attorney to decide what to indict for; then its up to the jury. You'll get a chance to tell your story. Now we have to find the kid. He's a fugitive. He should have given himself up."

"I know, Lieutenant. I know now," Connie Faith said. "But we were so scared. I—I'm afraid he'll still be scared. He's got his rifles with him, wherever he is."

"He's armed!" Bellow said.

"No! Just his rifles," Connie Faith cried. "He hunts!"

Shayne tugged on his earlobe. "And you have no idea where he is?"

"None at all, Mr. Shayne," the woman said.

Shayne tugged harder on his ear. "You know, Miss Faith, it's quite a story, but aside from the part about meeting Marko at *The Red Porpoise,* and the part about going to your office, it's all your word, no witnesses. I sup-

pose you can prove you went into your office and stayed almost an hour?"

"Of course I can! Adam was there. He came in later. Right, Adam?"

Bishop nodded. "Yes, I did."

"And there were at least two office girls there the whole time and saw me!" Connie Faith said. "And it's not all my word, there is a witness—Tommy! When you find him, he'll confirm it all."

"If we find him," Shayne said, but his doubts were fading. The woman told a straight story. It fitted the facts.

"We'll find him," Lieutenant Bellow said.

"I . . ." Shayne began and stopped.

One of the policemen had heard it too. A slight noise outside the bungalow. Shayne whirled. The policeman reached for his gun. For one instant there was a face at the window; a big, pale face with a broken nose. Then the face was gone.

Shayne dashed for the door.

Bellow and his men were right behind Shayne.

Outside in the last light of the sun, they heard a man crashing through the bushes.

X

THEY LOST him. As Bellow and Shayne crashed through the bushes after him, the man made it to a car where another man waited with the engine running. The car tore off and vanished. Shayne and Bellow watched it.

"Tommy?" Bellow said. "With a friend?"

"Maybe," Shayne said. "It wasn't Tommy at the window. And he certainly would not come anywhere near the house, with a police car outside."

"It could have been the friend," Bellow said grimly, and he faced Shayne. "Mike, the kid may be your client, or someone close to him. I suggest you get in touch if you can and have him turn himself in. Meanwhile, I'm putting out an APB on the boy. Maybe it was self-defense, and maybe manslaughter. It's up to the jury to decide that. It's my job to catch him."

Shayne said nothing. What could he say? Bellow was right. Tommy had to be found. Shayne was not too optimistic. A boy who knew camping and hunting could hide in the back country for a long time. But Bellow's APB would flush him sooner or later. It would be much better for the boy if he turned himself in. Shayne's only chance to help now was that the boy would call someone, Patsy Weller maybe, or George Hale, or his parents.

Thinking this, Mike Shayne watched Bellow walk back to the house. The Lieutenant would take Connie Faith and Bishop to Head-

quarters to get their depositions, and to put out the APB.

Shayne looked around. He was near the spot Connie Faith had said Marko died. He walked back to the driveway and looked around. There were many trees, tall, full trees that made the whole area dark even in the twilight.

He imagined the scene. He looked at the soft earth. Even now, almost five days later the marks of the fight were clear. Also the feet of the police. Bellow had been over the ground.

Shayne rubbed his chin as he studied the marked ground. There had been a fight, a struggle, no doubt of it. He looked up at the nearby vegetation.

The bushes were thick, just as Connie Faith had said, only about twenty feet from the spot of the fight. Shayne walked slowly that way looking at the ground. Nothing unusual showed, although Shayne studied the earth closely. It was soft grass all the way to the thick bushes.

He got his searchlight from his car.

Shayne entered the bushes, looked at each bush closely as he passed through, and at the bare ground under the bushes. He reached the small open space among the trees where the body must have been, where Marko Kantor had died. The spot was clear; a stain of dried blood was still on the ground. Not far off he found a book of matches from *The Red Porpoise.*

He stood at the spot where the body had been, where the small patch of blood was still visible, and looked in all directions. The spot was completely hidden from where Connie Faith and young Tommy must have been standing. Marko Kantor had died alone.

Shayne began to tug on his earlobe. He made a slow and very careful study of the entire area of bushes between where the body had been and where the fight had taken place. When he finished, he stood for a long time tugging on his ear.

Something was odd.

He could not immediately place

what it was. He retraced his steps to where the fight had happened near the house. It was now almost dark, and the area was in the deep shadow of the thick trees above and around the house. The only real light was that which came through the lighted window of the cottage where Bellow was still sitting there, talking to Connie Faith.

Shayne rubbed his chin a moment, then went softly to the window where he had seen the big face only a little while ago. He looked over the area beneath the window. There was nothing. Where he stood he could hear the voices inside clearly. So the man had aheard, it depended on how long he had been there as to just what he had heard.

Shayne wondered if it had been a friend sent by Tommy to hear what the police knew. If it had been, then Tommy Planck was probably going to be very hard to find—a panicked boy was not going to come in to face a possible manslaughter charge!

Still thinking about this, Shayne watched the woman and the airline captain being taken away by Lieutenant Bellow and his men. He thought for a time, and then went to his car. He was hungry. It was time for dinner, past time and there was little else he could do until there was some lead to Tommy Planck. Bellow would have Kantor's car fished out of the Bay, and the APB would turn Tommy up sooner or later.

Shayne's problem was to get to Tommy first if he could, to convince the boy to turn himself in. It would look much better to the jury if he did turn himself in. It could mean the difference between self-defense and manslaughter.

He continued to think about this over dinner. He had a good double chateubriand and a double glass of brandy to finish the meal. By then he had decided that the best he could do was try all Tommy's friends again for some overlooked clue that might lead to Tommy's hiding place.

At that moment he heard his name. A waiter was paging Mike Shayne.

"Here," Shayne said.

"Telephone, sir," the waiter said.

Immediately alert, Shayne strode to the telephone. He got up so fast his injured head gave a dull lurch. He steadied himself, he had almost forgotten his head. He reached the telephone. It was Lucy—an excited Lucy.

"Michael? I've been trying to get you everywhere! Patsy Weller has been attacked!"

"Attacked? By who?"

"I don't know, Michael. I just know her father called all shaken up. He said some men had accosted her on the street near her house, asked a lot of questions,

beat her up, and ran when she screamed. She told her father to call you!"

"I'm on my way there, Angel," Shayne snapped.

He hung up, clapped his panama on his head, winced as he again forgot his bandaged head, and ran out of the restaurant after paying the check.

* * *

PATSY WELLER was sitting up in bed. Her face was swollen, and she would have a black eye tomorrow. There were scratches. The girl seemed nearly in a state of shock.

"Five minutes, Mr. Shayne. No more," her doctor said.

The doctor, and her parents left. Shayne sat on the edge of the bed and smiled at the girl. She did not smile back. Her blue eyes were wide and frightened.

"They asked about Tommy! All those questions about Tommy!"

Shayne touched her arm. It was tembling. "Easy, Patsy. Start from the beginning."

"I was walking home. They stopped me. Two men, they just came out of the bushes. A big man, ugly—oh, he was so ugly I was afraid to look at him. He held me. The other one, the smaller one with the smile, he asked the questions. All he did was smile! That terrible smile. He asked and asked! Where was Tommy? What was Tommy up to? Why had he been mixed up with Marko? Where was Tommy? Where was Tommy? Where was—"

"Easy," Shayne said. But he was thinking hard. A big, ugly man and a small one who smiled. Turk and Roy! Almost without a doubt. Then it must have been Roy at the window of Connie Faith's cottage, Turk in the car that escaped. They knew that Tommy had killed Marko!

Patsy shivered. "They asked and asked. They hit me, the small one hit me. The big one held me and the small one hit me! I screamed! But no one came. No one heard me. I was hurt. They hurt me. And they asked, and asked, and—"

"It's all right, Patsy," Shayne said.

The girl's blue eyes were so wide. "No. I told! I told them! I—I couldn't—"

"Told?" Shayne said quickly. "Told what? What could you tell them?"

Patsy was afraid. "George. George called me. I was going to call you when I got home. George called. He told me that Tommy had called him, asked what was happening, was I all right. He didn't tell me anything else, just that Tommy had called him, and that Tommy was all right. He said Tommy told him to tell me that he was okay and that he would come back when he could and that he was

sorry he had caused me so much trouble."

"You told them?" Shayne said.

"I hurt so—I told them about George—"

"Not where Tommy was?"

She shook her head. "No, I couldn't. George didn't tell me. But I told them about George! I—"

Her voice had fallen to a whisper. The doctor came back. He nodded to Shayne. But the redhead needed no hint. He patted the girl's arm and walked out fast. He went to the telephone. George Hale's home number was in the book. Shayne called it. There was no answer. Shayne called the Acme Sheet Metal Company. George Hale was not there. George had been, but had stepped out. No, George had not come back.

Shayne hung up and ran out of the house to his car. In the night he drove as fast as he could to the Acme Sheet Metal Company.

XI

THE SHEET METAL works was still operating its swing shift. Mike Shayne checked at the factory, George was not there, had not returned. Shayne went outside and looked around in the night. The factory was in an area of vacant lots. There was a large parking lot. Shayne made a search of the parking lot. He found nothing.

He left the parking lot and began to cover the open lots. In the night it was hard to see. The vacant lots were irregular, full of depressions shadowed in the night. He searched three of the lots around the building before he heard the noise.

It was a moan, low and full of pain.

Shayne listened in the night. It came again. To his left, somewhere among the shadows. A desperate moan, and then the sound of movement, of something crawling. Shayne walked toward it, his hand on his pistol.

At first he saw nothing. Then, the groan coming again, he saw a vague movement of the shadows directly in front of him and below. Someone lay in a deep hollow in the vacant lot. Shayne struck a match. It was George Hale.

Shayne jumped down into the hollow and crouched beside the boy. Hale had been beaten badly. The boy's nose looked broken; there was blood all over his face. His left arm hung at a grotesque angle. But he was conscious and trying to crawl out of the hollow. His agonized eyes looked up at Shayne.

"Mr. Shayne?"

"Yes, George. Can you stand?"

"I don't think so," the boy said. "Listen, I told them—"

"Easy," Shayne said. "First tell me if there is any bad bleeding. How do you feel inside?"

The boy shook his head slowly. "I'm all right. They hit my face,

broke the arm, but that's all. I'll be okay. But you got to hurry! I told them where he is!"

Shayne watched the boy. "You knew where Tommy is?"

"He—he called me tonight. He's in a cabin back in the Everglades. He's scared and lonesome. He told me not to tell. But it was the arm. They broke it. They said they'd break the other. I told— You got to get after them."

"A big man and a smiling smaller man?"

"Yeh. One's called Turk. I don't know what they—wanted!"

"I think I do," Shayne said grimly. "Now you lie still, got it? I'll get help."

"No! Go after them—"

"How long ago did they leave?"

"Maybe half an hour. I'll tell you where the—cabin is!"

Shayne listened to the directions. It was a fair distance. With luck they might be in time to stop Turk and Roy. He left George Hale and ran to the office of *Acme Sheet Metal.* He called Lieutenant Bellow. The lieutenant wasted no time on talk when he heard Shayne's story. Bellow came fast in a wail of sirens, the ambulance and doctor right behind him.

Shayne turned to Bellow. "We better get out there fast, George," the red-head said.

"You think Turk and Roy want revenge?"

"They heard Connie Faith's story. What do you think?"

"I think we better get there fast if we want to find Tommy Planck alive," Bellow said grimly.

"And you better bring some men," Shayne said equally grimly.

The two men ran for their cars. Moments later, three cars roared off toward the Everglades. Bellow led, Shayne came second, and Bellow's second car brought up the rear. In the first car, Bellow radioed instructions to contact the local police near the Everglades cabin.

The drive was long and fast. At first there were many houses and the lights of people. After a time the houses thinned, the lights became fewer, and the three cars raced through the dark night. Then they plunged into the wild land of swamp and dark towering trees that was the Everglades.

The cabin was set on a small island of dry land in the midst of the still and silent water of the great swamp. The local police had supplied the shallow-draft flat boats. The boats were poled silently toward the island and the cabin—the powerful swamp boats powered by the aircraft engines and propeller had not been used because they made too much noise.

"There's our man on stakeout," the local sergeant, Ben Bertin, said softly.

Bellow and Shayne saw the faint shadow of another boat ahead. The sergeant had a whispered conversation with his men on stakeout.

Then the sergeant poled his boat over to Shayne and Bellow. The sergeant nodded toward the cabin on the island. There was light in the cabin window.

"He's in there all right," the sergeant said. "My men say he hasn't moved from the place, but he seems nervous. Been pacing and looking out the window."

"Any sign of anyone else?" Shayne asked.

"No, not—"

Bertin stopped, stared into the night, held up his hand for silence. Shayne followed the direction of the sergeant's eyes. At first he could see nothing at all. Then he noticed that the other local police were crouched low in their flat boats and staring in the same direction.

Shayne peered hard into the shifting shadows of the silent swamp.

He saw the movement.

He could not see what moved, but the fact of motion was plain in the dark night. Something was moving on the silent swamp water, moving on the far side of the island toward the cabin. A shape in the night.

Then the shape seemed to separate before Shayne's eyes and became a long, low flat shape, and two upright shapes. The vertical shapes moved up and down, swayed, stooped.

Suddenly, there was a harsh, muttered oath.

A hoarse whisper. "Shut up!"

A whispered protest. "I slipped, Turk."

Then there was a faint bump, a scrape.

The flat boat with Turk and Roy standing up and poling it ahead had touched the island. The sergeant motioned his men forward. Bellow and Shayne gripped the gunwales of the flatboat as it glided silently in toward the island. The local police, trained in swamp work, made none of the noises that Turk and Roy had made.

The local police, Bellow and his men, and Mike Shayne moved in swiftly and silently, like pirates gliding in for an attack on an unsuspecting village. They touched land and slid silently from the boats and glided across the island. They passed the cabin and fanned out like wraiths in the night.

There was another oath somewhere ahead.

The police seemed to sink from sight into the ground of the island itself.

Two men appeared for a moment in the path of light from the cabin window. Turk, small and pointing to the cabin, and Roy, big and muttering and rubbing his face where a thick branch had struck him as he stumbled through the dark. For a long few seconds the two stood there outlined in the light. Then Turk touched Roy, pointed, and the two men began to separate and move toward the

cabin. Each one held an ugly automatic pistol.

"All right! Freeze!" Sergeant Bertin called sharply.

The two men stopped.

"Turk! Roy! Drop the guns!" Bellow called.

Turk dove for the cover on his left. Roy ran for the cabin. The cabin light went out. For an instant there was only darkness. Then three searchlights lighted the whole area.

The local police turned on their lights and the island was as bright as day.

Turk, caught in the full glare of a searchlight, crouched bent for an instant, his automatic pointed in the direction of the light. Then he straightened up, dropped the pistol, and raised his hands.

"Okay, coppers," Turk said, and the man smiled.

Roy had less brains or more courage. The big man, caught by the light like a clumsy moth, neither turned nor slowed in his dash for the cover of the cabin.

Bellow shouted, "Roy! Hold it! Now!"

Roy ran on. Bellow fired a shot into the air. The big ex-pug continued to run. He ran madly. Bellow fired. Hit in the leg, Roy sprawled in the dirt, skidded, came up on his knees. In the glare of the searchlight, Roy's maddened eyes were red, his mouth snarled, his hands came up with the automatic held in both hands.

"No!" Roy croaked hoarsely. "No!"

"Drop that gun!" Bellow shouted.

Roy shook his head like an enraged bull. "No! No!"

The big ex-pug raised the automatic, aimed at the light. A hail of bullets exploded the night and knocked Roy back flat against the ground. The big man crawled, raised up, raised the automatic. Another hail of shots rang out.

Roy sprawled flat on his back, hurled flat, and did not get up again.

Where he stood in the light with his hands up, Turk looked at his dead friend without a flicker of expression.

The police moved in. Three policemen surrounded Turk. Two more bent over the dead Roy. Bellow, Shayne and the sergeant walked toward the dark cabin.

"Tommy!" Bellow called. "Come on out."

There was movement in the cabin. A window suddenly smashed. The muzzle of a shotgun was thrust out.

"No! You all stay away!"

The police stopped and looked at the dark cabin and the muzzle of the shotgun.

XII

THE LIGHTS played on the cabin. The police crouched out of sight behind the light. Lieutenant Bellow and the local sergeant kneeled and considered what to do.

In the cabin there was only silence.

After a time, Lieutenant Bellow stepped out of the shadows into the path of light from the police searchlights. He held out both hands to show that he was not armed. He began to talk.

"Tommy? I'm Lieutenant Bellow of the Miami police. You're surrounded, boy. Give up. We've heard the story from Miss Faith."

There was a silence; the shotgun barrel seemed to move.

"She—told you?" the unseen voice said.

"She told us," Bellow said. "She had to. It could be just self-defense; don't get yourself in real trouble now."

The shotgun barrel steadied in the glare of the searchlight. The unseen voice of Tommy Planck was bitter.

"And it could be something else. I know. Don't try to fool me! I know about fight killings. You all get out of here! You hear me?"

The boy's voice rose in an hysterical pitch. It was clear that Tommy was half out of his mind, hysterical with fear and confusion. Behind the lights the police prepared tear gas, prepared their plans for rushing the cabin under the cover of the gas.

Inside the cabin Tommy Planck crouched at the smashed window, the shotgun in his hands, his finger tight on the trigger. He was shaking with a strange mixture of fear and anger. He knew he had done nothing, but the police would not believe him! He knew that the death of Marko had been an accident, self-defense, but he was afraid of prison. No one would ever believe him! They would put him in jail! In a cage! They would never believe him!

Tommy watched the glaring lights. Sweat poured down his face in the stifling air of the shut-in swamp cabin. He watched the shadows moving behind the lights. They would use tear-gas. He had seen the movies, read the books. They would try tear-gas and then rush him! They wouldn't believe

him! No, not in a million years! Never!

Tommy, staring out, scared, shivering with fear and anger, did not hear the movement behind him. He neither heard nor saw the window open on the other side of the dark cabin. He did not see the dark shape climb silently through the window, drop to the floor as softly as a big cat, then glide through the dark cabin toward him.

He was watching the lieutenant of police step again out into the light. He was staring at the Lieutenant, concentrating, hoping that they would, after all, let him go. The voice was only inches behind him.

"All right, Tommy, drop the shotgun," Mike Shayne said.

The boy whirled.

Shayne chopped a hard blow on the boy's wrist. The shotgun clattered to the floor. Tommy grabbed for it. Shayne kicked it across the cabin. The boy screamed hatred, lunged at Shayne. The big red-head slapped Tommy hard on the face. The boy collapsed in a sobbing heap.

Shayne stepped to the door and unlocked it. He stood in the light of the searchlights.

"Okay, you can all come in now."

The red-head turned back to the boy. Tommy was sitting on the floor, his head down, all the fight gone out of him. He did not move; he only sat there with his head down, his shoulders hunched.

Bellow and Shayne stood over the boy. Tommy looked up at last. He shrugged. He was haggard, his unshaven face grey with fatigue. His eyes hopeless.

"I killed him," Tommy Planck said. "I didn't mean to kill him! He was a louse. I hit him. He pulled the gun. I killed him."

Shayne and Bellow looked at the boy and then at each other.

"You better get up, son," Bellow said. "Don't say any more until we get you back to Miami. Shayne, you better advise him until he can get a lawyer."

"Don't say any more, Tommy," Shayne said. "The lieutenant is right."

Bellow looked grim. "Thomas Planck, I have to charge you for the death of Marko Kantor."

The boy smiled, shrugged, said nothing. Shayne was tugging on his left earlobe. Open and shut. The boy admitted that he had killed Marko. And yet—? The suspicion that had been in the back of Shayne's mind since he had looked at the scene of Marko's death was still there. He turned to Bellow.

"I suppose his car is nearby, Lieutenant. Mind if I look at it? One of your men will have to drive it back," Shayne said.

"Go ahead, Mike. But you better come back with us, too. I'd like you there when we take his statement," Bellow said.

"Sure," Shayne said.

As he left he stopped and patted the shoulder of Tommy Planck. The boy barely noticed.

They found Planck's car on the mainland less than a mile away, where he had said it was. Shayne opened all the doors and had a close look at the car. He studied the front and back seats. He found one tiny stain on the rear seat. It looked like blood.

Shayne stood back and examined it for some time. Then he nodded to the policeman. Together they searched the trunk and every inch of the car.

"Okay," Shayne said. "You better drive it back to Miami. Tell Bellow I'll follow along in my own car."

He left the policeman getting into the car, and walked back to the boat they had used. He watched from the shadows of the night as Bellow and all the police, and their two prisoners came to the mainland.

Shayne hid the boat he had used, then went to join Bellow and his men. The local police drove them back to the local station house, where they had left their own cars. Shayne got into his car and told Bellow he would drive back first.

"Okay, Mike," Bellow said.

"Did you find anything at the cabin?" Shayne asked.

"Find? No, what would we find?" Bellow said.

"I was wondering just why Turk and Roy were so anxious to get Tommy," Shayne said.

"Revenge. What else?" Bellow said.

"I guess so," Shayne said.

He got into his car and drove off along the road toward Miami. He drove a mile. There was no one behind him. He pulled off into a side dirt road. A few minutes later Bellow's two cars and the car of Tommy Planck went by.

Shayne backed out of the side road and drove back past the local station house to the place where he had left the boat.

In the boat, he poled out again to the island and the cabin. He went into the cabin and he searched it from top to bottom. He examined the grounds of the small island. He searched up in the trees with his powerful flashlight. He checked the shallow water all around the island.

Then he went back to the boat, poled to the mainland, went to his car, and drove off toward Miami. He was two hours behind Bellow now. He drove fast.

XIII

WHEN SHAYNE strode into the interrogation room of Miami police headquarters they were all there. Lieutenant Bellow was just beginning the interrogation of Tommy Planck. Will Gentry sat in the corner, chewing on his black cigar stump. The Chief of Miami

Police still had time to take a personal interest in most of the cases in his Department, if not to make a personal investigation.

Gentry grunted as Shayne came in. "Just in time, Mike. What kept you? Bellow said you should have gotten here first?" Gentry said.

"I had some business," Shayne said.

Gentry watched him, seemed about to speak, and then said nothing. Shayne stood against the wall to watch. Gentry nodded to Bellow.

"Okay, George, let's get the boy's story."

"Go ahead, Tommy," Bellow said.

The tall, husky boy nodded as if he could hardly care less. But he began his story. Shayne listened and watched the others in the room. Turk Jacks sat sullenly in a chair, flanked by two policemen. The small crook barely listened to the story. He was smoking and looking into space.

Connie Faith and Captain Adam Bishop sat together near Gentry. The Faith woman looked steadily at Tommy. Her face was a picture of sadness and sympathy mixed with a certain guilt that she had, after all, gotten him into this. Patsy Weller looked at Connie Faith with something close to hatred. The elder Plancks watched their son with dull hatred. How dare he do such a thing to them!

Shayne glanced at the parents from time to time. With parents like that, he reflected, it was a miracle Tommy was only up on a manslaughter charge.

George Hale was not there. The boy was still in the hospital.

Tommy told his story simply and in a voice as flat as a grey dawn. He sounded hopeless. What was there to tell? He had killed Marko Kantor. He had fallen in love with Connie Faith, and when Marko began to threaten her, badger her, he went to her help.

"I wish you hadn't, Tommy," Connie said. "I wish I'd never ever let you get into this."

Tommy shrugged. "I don't, not that part. I'm glad he's dead, he deserved to die. You know he did, Connie. You said that when we decided I had to hide out."

Connie Faith sighed. "That was a mistake, too, I guess. Oh, if only we'd thought more!"

Bellow brought the boy back to the story. "Just tell us what happened?"

"I killed him, that's what happened. Connie told you all of it. What more do you want?"

Will Gentry took his cigar out of his mouth. "We have Miss Faith's story. We want yours."

Tommy shrugged again. "I waited in the bushes near the house. Connie and Marko showed up. I jumped out of the bushes and told him to get out of Miami. He laughed. I told him if he didn't leave Connie alone he'd get more

of what I was going to give him, and then I hit him!"

"You hit him first?" Shayne said.

Tommy nodded. "I hit first. But he was scaring her to death; he was threatening her. So I hit him. He went down and pulled that gun. I grappled with him. In the struggle the gun went off. I thought Connie was hit; she screamed. I went to her, but she was okay. Then we saw Marko staggering off into the bushes. When I got to him he was already dead. We found the gun on the ground back where he'd been shot.

"We put the body in my car and drove it to the bay. We dumped it in. We dumped his car in another part of the bay. I guess you found it. Then I borrowed the money from George and hid out in the Everglades. That's all." Tommy Planck stared at Mike Shayne.

There was a silence. Patsy Weller was near tears. The elder Plancks were glaring at their son. Gentry and Bellow were looking at each other. The official stenographer was touching up her notes. Connie Faith and Captain Bishop were looking unhappy. Shayne was observing Turk Jacks. The former friend of Marko Kantor had stopped smoking, had stopped looking bored.

Turk was staring at Tommy Planck with something like amazement on his face.

"No," Shayne said suddenly in the silence, "not exactly like Connie told it."

They all looked at Mike Shayne. Will Gentry almost smiled.

"Something on your mind, Mike?" The Chief of Police said.

Shayne nodded. "Quite a few things."

"But, Mike," Lieutenant Bellow said, "the story checks out all the way. Tommy admits he killed Marko in that fight. I don't see anything in his story, or in the facts, that change the simple fact that he killed Marko Kantor."

Shayne tugged on his earlobe and looked at Tommy. The husky boy was watching Shayne with an expression of blank confusion.

"I killed him, Mr. Shayne. You can't change that. I grabbed the gun; we fought, it went off, and he was hit. How can you change that?"

Shayne smiled. "Maybe I can't, but let's see a few points. First, you said you hit him once; he went down and pulled his gun. Connie said you fought for some time, you knocked Marko down a few times, and only after he had been thoroughly knocked around did he draw his gun. Now which is it? Did you knock him down many times before he pulled the gun, or only once?"

Tommy blinked. "Only once, Mr. Shayne, I'm sure. It happened so fast."

Shayne looked at Connie Faith. "Miss Faith?"

"I suppose it was only once," the woman said. "Like Tommy said, it all happened so fast."

Shayne nodded. "Yes, so fast. Then there wasn't what you'd call a real fight. Just one punch, the gun, and grapple."

Lieutenant Bellow said, "Does it matter, Mike? Unless, yes, I suppose a jury would think better of Tommy if there was no real fight. More self-defense."

"Something like that," Shayne said. He turned back to the boy who was watching him with hope now. "Tommy, you said that Connie screamed. She said the same. You're both sure of that? You're sure that the instant the gun went off, Connie screamed and you ran to her?"

"I thought she was hit," Tommy said.

"So you did," Shayne said. "So you didn't know Marko had been hit until you looked back from where you were standing with Connie, right? Then you saw him stagger into the bushes. You went after him but not right away. You found him dead. You found the gun, his gun, back where you had struggled. Right?"

Tommy nodded. "Yes, Mr. Shayne."

"And Connie and you agreed that you should hide out," Shayne said. "You're sure?"

Tommy seemed puzzled. "Yes, Mr. Shayne. She said it might all blow over. Marko had so many enemies and all. There was no way to trace it, she said."

"In fact, it was really her idea that you run," Shayne said.

"Well—" Tommy began.

Connie Faith broke in. "Why not, Mr. Shayne? I really felt that no one would trace Marko to Tommy or me."

"Did you? Then why did you tell the whole thing to Lieutenant Bellow so quickly? You were mighty fast to spill your guts."

"No, not at all," Connie Faith said. "The lieutenant knew I had been with Marko. I was seen."

"No, only a woman was seen. You could have held out a lot longer. You wanted us to go after Tommy, Miss Faith. You—"

Tommy Planck burst out. "But, Mr. Shayne, what does it all matter? I killed him! I shot him! I mean, I *know* I did."

Shayne looked grim. "No, Tommy, I don't think you know much of anything. I don't think you shot Marko at all. As a matter of fact, I don't think you ever saw Marko until he was dead!"

In the interrogation room they all stared. Except Turk Jacks. The criminal laughed aloud.

XIV

TURK'S LAUGH echoed through the room as everyone else sat in a kind of stunned silence. It was Lieutenant Bellow who spoke first.

"What are you talking about,

Shayne!" Bellow said. "We all heard the stories! They agree! How the hell—"

Will Gentry chewed on his cigar and watched Mike Shayne with a small smile. "Let him finish, Lieutenant."

"But—" Tommy Planck said.

Adam Bishop watched Shayne in silence. The elder Plancks seemed confused. Only Patsy Weller watched with a sudden look of hope.

Shayne rubbed his gaunt chin. "Well, when I looked over the ground out at Miss Faith's cottage I noticed a few things," he said. "In the first place it's very dark around that cottage, almost black if there is no light from the bungalow itself. Second, there was no blood!"

Shayne turned to Bellow. "Did you check Tommy's car closely for blood, Lieutenant?"

"Of course," Bellow said. "And we found it. Marko's type. Marko's blood was in Tommy's car, Shayne."

"I know," Shayne said, "but how much?"

"How much? Well, very little. We—"

"One spot, in fact," Shayne said. "Just the one tiny spot on the back seat, where the body had rested for the whole drive to the bay. No blood anywhere else, right?"

Bellow nodded. "Right, Mike."

Shayne nodded, looked at Connie Faith. "And there was no blood on the ground where Marko was supposedly shot! And there was no trail of blood through the bushes! No blood on the bushes at all! And there was not a lot of blood where Marko supposedly died!"

Shayne looked again at Bellow. "Tell me, Bellow, did that chest wound bleed a lot? Would you say it had?"

Bellow blinked, stared, slowly nodded. "Yes, I'd say it bled a great deal!"

Shayne insisted, "And yet there was no trail of blood, and no blood where the shooting took place! Did you analyze Marko's car for blood, Bellow? Not Tommy's, but Marko's car—the car the body wasn't supposed to have been in?"

"No," Bellow said.

"I suggest you do," Shayne said. "And you'll find some traces of Marko's blood!"

Will Gentry spoke quietly. "Spell it out in English, Mike. What are you saying exactly?"

Shayne tugged slowly on his left earlobe. "I'm saying, Will, that Tommy did not kill Marko Kantor even by accident or in self-defense. I'm saying that Tommy did not even fight with Marko Kantor. I'm saying that Marko was already dead before there was any fight!"

Shayne looked at Connie Faith. The woman was as pale as wet chalk. Shayne was grim. "I'm saying, Will, that Marko Kantor's body, already dead for some time, was back there in the bushes where

Tommy found it—*before Tommy ever had his fight that night!* I'm saying that Marko Kantor had been murdered earlier!"

In the silence only one man spoke. Turk Jacks, flanked by the two policemen, looked at Shayne with an eager smile, said, "Yeh, peeper. That's it for sure! Yeh, man!"

Will Gentry ignored Turk Jacks. "What did happen, Mike?"

"My guess is that Marko was killed around nine o'clock, a few minutes after. He was dead over an hour, and lying back there in the bushes, when Tommy got into his fight. Tommy stepped out, confronted a couple he thought were Marko and Connie Faith. It was very dark there, remember. It all happened fast, both Tommy and Miss Faith agree. Tommy never did actually see Marko hit by a bullet. What he did see was a gun fire, and Connie screamed at once.

"He ran to Connie. When he looked back he saw Marko go off into the bushes, apparently hit. He followed and found a dead man. But it was not the same man! Tommy had been fighting with some man who was not Marko! Remember, it was dark, it happened very fast, and he had never met Marko Kantor! All he had was the word of Connie Faith that the man he fought was Marko!"

All eyes turned to the pretty young woman in the airline stewardesses uniform. She did not look pretty now. She almost snarled at Mike Shayne.

"Meaning I killed Marko? Why, Shayne? Prove it!"

Shayne nodded. "I'll do that."

Shayne turned to Turk Jacks. "You weren't looking for the killer of Marko just for revenge, Turk. You and Roy didn't give a damn for Marko, did you? What were you so anxious to find, Turk?"

Turk laughed. "The loot, what else? The stones, you know? The jewels we got from that robbery. Marko had them. He said he had a way of getting them out of the country. He said Connie'd get them and him out of the country. Marko got killed, and the rocks was missing!"

Shayne nodded. "There it is. I figure she might have killed Marko anyway; he was ruining her life again. But the jewels were the final temptation. I searched Tommy's cabin and car—no jewels. I don't think Tommy even knew there were jewels. But Connie knew, because Marko needed her help for his getaway! He told her, and she planned the whole murder when she realized Tommy would do anything for her!"

Shayne looked at Adam Bishop. The airline captain had been watching, listening, a scared look on his handsome face. Now he saw Shayne staring at him.

"We'll find the jewels, you know, Bishop. We'll probably even find the gun and the blank cartridges.

When we find the jewels, we'll have our killer!"

There was one more long silence. Then Adam Bishop began to nod, his shoulders sagging.

"She killed him, like you said. He was dead all the time she was in the airline office, out in the bushes. I'm about the same build. It was dark as hell. I did it fast. The kid never really saw my face. He hit me, I went down, pulled the gun. I let him grapple, and I fired the blank. Connie screamed. The kid ran to her. I staggered off into the bushes and just kept going. The kid found Marko where we'd planted him. Connie put the gun back on the grass—the real gun, his gun."

Connie Faith screamed her hate. "You stupid coward! You bastard! You—"

Adam Bishop shrugged.

"I loved her. I still do, even after what she did to that kid Tommy. But she killed him. I'm not taking the rap!"

Will Gentry stood up and motioned for the policemen to take them both away.

It was late next afternoon when Bellow, Shayne and Gentry sat in Gentry's office. The gruff Chief of Police studied his cigar.

"Bishop told it all. We found the jewels buried in her yard. He gave us the gun and his coat with the powder burns."

"I found traces of blood in his car," Bellow said. "She got him out of the car to kill him, let him lie in the bushes near the airline office. He didn't bleed much when Bishop took him to her place and hid him where Tommy found him."

"He bled even less where she hid him," Shayne said. "I knew something was wrong. There just wasn't enough blood around. It was a good plan. Tommy would have believed anything she told him."

"Too bad she didn't know enough about real love," Gentry said.

"Real love?" Shayne said.

Gentry nodded. "The kind of love that makes a woman worry about her man. It was Patsy Weller who ruined her by bringing you in, Mike."

"You'd have figured it out," Shayne said.

"Maybe," Gentry said. "But you did it. It was a hell of a good scheme Love did her in."

"No," Shayne said. "Greed. It's always greed. Her greed for the jewels she just had to have, and Turk and Roy's greed for the jewels they had to have—it was Turk and Roy that didn't fit."

"And not enough blood," Bellow said.

Mike Shayne smiled, shrugged. Gentry glared at Bellow. The Chief had already had a few words to say to his lieutenant about looking at the scene of a crime. Will Gentry would have a lot more to say later.

Special Treatment

He had decided to play God with a hundred men's lives—but the devil took a hand in the game . . .

MORRIS HERSHMAN

WARDEN LON PETERS turned to his two subordinates. "I've called you up here," he said, "because I think we've all been given a big opportunity on account of—believe it or not—the fire that's hit the prison."

He tapped his fingers against the rear window of the sleek dark car that was taking him to the scene of the fire. Deputy-Warden Foy looked at him curiously in the driver's mirror. Harry Vedova, whose title was that of principal keeper, watched grimly.

"I was on my way back to town just twenty minutes ago when I heard about the fire," Warden Peters said, "and I couldn't help thinking that here was a chance to start from the ground up on a new prison and make some long overdue reforms."

"Maybe we could fill up the new jail with honest people," Vedova said humorlessly.

Peters ignored that. "In a new prison we might be able to cut out the sixty-day tryout period when a recently arrived man sits by himself and doesn't work. That alone can drive a man stir-crazy."

"We always handle 'em the same way." Vedova's breath whistled between his teeth. "The rules say we have to."

"Rules can be changed," Lon Peters pointed out grimly. "Instead of four men in a cell, with two of them sleeping on the floor on mat-

tresses because there isn't space or money for more beds, we'll try having two men in a cell, and make sure none of those men are queers."

"But the rules don't say nothing about that."

"This is a chance to make new rules, Vedova. And I think we'll cut out the business of waking men for a head count every thirty minutes at night. A good night's sleep never hurt anybody."

Vedova smashed a blunt fist into a thick calloused palm. "We ain't running no—excuse *me,* Warden."

"—Country club, you were going to say," the warden finished for him, smiling wryly. "Any place where a man is kept in prison can't be called a country club."

As Vedova scowled down at himself, Warden Peters glanced out of the window at the familiar night-tinted countryside rushing past. "And then there's the food. Maybe we can stop saving money on it, and give the men some decent meals, for a change. Maybe we can give the men knives and forks, too, instead of making them eat everything with spoons."

Vedova spread his arms. "They'll be living like kings, the whole pack of 'em."

"About letters," the warden went on smoothly. "We could drop the restriction of only three letters a month. And we don't have to automatically hold up letters ten days for processing. We can give the men newspapers every day and electric razors, if they want 'em."

Foy asked, "How about the rule of silence? No talking after work."

"We might be able to scrap that during a recreation period in the new prison. They can be watched more effectively without the added repression."

The back of Vedova's neck grew pink. Foy asked, "Are those the only changes you figure on, Warden?"

"I was thinking about the guards, too."

"What about 'em, Warden?"

"I want you two to take some of them aside and tell them for once in their lives to be civil to the prisoners. They don't have to shine the prisoners' shoes; but I don't want them smacking men around or daring a man to look crooked at them and then reporting him for solitary."

"You know what most guards are like, Warden," Foy said smoothly. "A bunch of stupes. They can't make any more money at different jobs, so they join the prison system. You can't ever get an idea through their heads."

"Just the same," Warden Peters said, "we'll try it now and see what happens."

The car swerved into a vast courtyard. Apprehensively the warden looked out. The two wings were still standing, though one full side of each wing had been dyed coal black by the fire. The twenty-

foot heap of powdery rubble between the wings was all that remained of the massive main building, complete with administrative offices and records.

The Warden asked quietly, "Where are the men?"

"In their cells, sir."

"I mean, the men who were housed in the main building. The bulk of the prison population."

Principal Keeper Vedova looked embarrassed. "Well, we didn't know what to do about 'em, Warden."

"How do you mean?"

"When the fire broke out, me and Foy figured it would be under control very soon. It got so bad, though, that the two of us had to run for our lives. The guards had to run, too. There was no other way to handle it. You know this building was like a bunch of phone booths, with no room to do anything."

"But all you had to do was pull some switches and open the cell doors. You know that as well as I do."

"We couldn't," Vedova said definitely. "The rules say that the men are supposed to be in their cells at night."

"For heav—"

"We didn't know what they'd do if we let 'em out. We didn't know where they'd get to, what they might try."

"But now you know they're dead, or that most of them have got to be, after this, you can be sure you did your job."

Wardon Lon Peters' fury gave way to a despairing numbness. He couldn't have known that his deputy warden and his principal keeper would be so stupidly, rigidly rule-bound.

If he had, he would not have tried to hasten a complete reform himself by setting the fire with a delayed action fuse before he had left the prison a few hours ago.

Next Month's New MIKE SHAYNE Short Novel

AN END TO HORROR

by BRETT HALLIDAY

The next issue of this magazine will headline one of the most incredibly exciting stories in all the history of MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE. *The red-head, left for dead, must somehow get through a dragnet of bullets to bring to bay one of the most ruthless blackmailer-killers alive! To read Mike Shayne is to read the best in crime-action fiction. Don't miss this one!*

Featuring

FRANCES BASCOMB IVY

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS TO LIVE

They were wealthy, young, care-free and having a wonderful time, those fortunate people—save one. The one who had exactly one day left to live.

by CHARLES VENTURA

WARREN LESTER considered Constance Allen's swim parties a splashing bore. He only tolerated the wealthy young widow's binges when he had blown his monthly allowance and exhausted his credit with all of the barkeeps along the Costa del Sol.

His eyes roamed over the bronzed semi-nude bodies reclining on sunmats at poolside. The burnt offerings were the cream of the feminine crop in southern Spain, but they looked a little shopworn to Warren. Most of the sun-baked flesh belonged to bored young housewives, of whom he had long since tired.

His pulse quickened as he peeked past his hostess's bikini-clad bulges and realized that something new had been added. Enraptured, his gaze lingered over a gorgeous redhead with exquisitely tapered legs and eye-compelling curves.

Mrs. Allen noted Warren's interest with only a brief twinge of resentment. She lost no time in guiding him to the prone beauty. Young Lester found himself looking deep into a pair of cornflower blue eyes that quickened his pulse and left him a trifle breathless.

His hostess tossed him a wicked grin. "Your libido is showing, dear boy. The object of your lecherous scrutiny is Frances Bascom Ivy, one of my former classmates at dear old Crestview College. She's my house guest and under my special protection, so don't get any ideas."

Frances saw the bemused expression on his face change.

"I thought your name rang a bell," he said. Connie has raved about you many times. I even remember the nickname they gave you at school, F.B.—"

Mrs. Allen's kick in the shin stopped him in mid-sentence. "I'll show you to your locker, dear boy. I know how anxious you must be to get into swim trunks."

They were some distance away from the reclining figures at poolside when Connie Allen spoke.

"Sorry," she said. "But you were about to spill the beans. No one here knows that Frances is a private investigator. She's on a hush-hush assignment."

Warren whistled softly. "So, that's it! F. B. Ivy is the special investigator the chaps at the consulate have been hinting at since Charlie Forgan was poisoned. She's certainly taken on a man-size job."

Mrs. Allen's party mask dissolved. "Poor Charlie! What a horrible way to die! I wonder what fiend dreamed up the idea of using a slow-acting poision that takes twenty-four hours to kill. Even the Borgias were more humane. Don't you have any idea at all as to who the killer is?"

Warren Lester shook his head. Any one of a half-dozen people could have slipped the poor guy a lethal dose. It wouldn't be cricket to guess out loud."

Connie Allen shuddered. "Are you sure that Egyptian doctor in Tangier made a correct diagnosis?"

Warren nodded. "Dr. Eily's findings were later confirmed by the two top medical men in Madrid. They agreed that a rare poison had been used. The scary part of it is that the victim doesn't feel any pain until a short time before death."

He patted his hostess on a sunburned shoulder and grinned as she winced. "Either you or I could be walking around right now, with a letal dose of the stuff in our systems and no way of knowing that we only have twenty-four hours to live. Don't look so alarmed, old girl. You don't fit into Charlie's pattern, but I do. We drank our meals in the same saloons and helped break up the same homes."

Connie Allen cast an oblique glance at the smiling face. "You're right, Warren. He also had another thing in common with you. He was a remittance man. His father was paying him to stay away from Boston."

Warren guffawed and kissed his hostess's cheek. "Touche, my fair lady. As you know, I am being paid to stay lost by my ever-loathing parents. They refuse to even fly over Torremolinos on their many trips to and from New York City."

He started for the locker-room. "Bye now. Try to restrain your eagerness for a few moments and I'll allow you to view my undraped muscles."

Young Lester headed for the redhead's sun mat the moment he was suitably attired. He sank down beside her and motioned for the attendant who was shuttling drinks from the poolside bar.

Frances Ivy shook her head as he gulped two double-martinis and ordered a third. "I was hoping you would tell me a little something about Connie's guests," she said with a sigh. "But if you drink another of those blockbusters under this hot sun, I wouldn't believe anything you said, under oath."

Warren snapped his fingers at the departing barman. "Jose, my good man, cancel that order and bring me a beaker of iced tomato-juice, liberally sprinkled with pepper, Lawry's salt and Worcestershire sauce."

Jose flashed a white-toothed grin. "Vodka or gin?"

"Neither," said Warren firmly. "You are never again to serve me an alcoholic beverage without a written order from Miss Ivy."

The redhead shot him an appreciative smile. "I'm properly impressed. Now, tell me something about that dynamic looking young couple."

She gestured toward a heavily bearded young man in plaid swim-trunks and a slim, dark woman in a very revealing bikini, who were basking on the opposite side of the pool.

Lester's glance was tinged with dislike. "That's Walter and Dysie Cameron. He grinds out mystery stories and tries to act like a combination of Ernest Hemingway and Mike Shayne."

He snorted. "The creep actually carries a dagger in a sheath and a revolver in an arm holster. Got a special permit from the local constabulary. Claims his life is in constant danger from communists he has exposed in his silly books. That goes over big with the Spanish police."

"What about the exotic looking woman in the sari and the dark man with the red fez?"

"That's Lola Montaya, Spain's fabulous Gypsy Queen. The fezzed gent is her husband. His name is Sulam Hassan. Lola's

parties are famous. She tosses them in her air-conditioned cave beneath the Alhambra Palace in Granada. The best flamenco dancers and the wildest gypsy music in the world."

Frances said, "The man with the monocle. He looks familiar, somehow."

"He should. Baron Carl Rode has been publicized almost as much as the late Serge Rubinstein and for the same shady reasons. The baron is rumored to have a sticky finger in a lot of pies—here, in Africa and in China. He's filthy rich. Has a private jet plane and pilot on call around the clock and owns a helicopter which he stashes away on the grounds of a fabulous estate in Tangier."

"Who is the handsome young Latin now being greeted by Connie? He looks dangerous."

Warren Lester nodded. "You have an observant eye. That's Chico Bustamente. He's the youngest of the current crop of matadors. Chico's hobby is hot-rods. He has a half-dozen souped-up sports cars that can outrun anything in Spain. We barflies love Chico. He's a soft touch for any pal who wants to borrow a car."

He paused and looked at her hopefully.

"Incidentally, friend Connie is cooking up a motor caravan to Tangier, tomorrow. She's probably told you about it. Chico has promised me his juiced-up Jaguar. Will you ride with me?"

"Of course I will."

Warren beamed. "Great! Let's get back to sleuthing. The man who just came in is Armand Dupre. He's supposed to be a retired rug-peddler from Morocco, but my guess is that he's mixed up in something illegitimate and vastly more profitable than rugs."

He waved a languid hand toward the bathers in the pool and a group gathered around the bar. "The rest of Connie's guests are transients—house-guests of her neighbors and a few people from the local inn."

Warren cast a sly look at the redhead. "None of them have been around long enough to rate as suspects in Charlie's murder. How'm I doing as an assistant private-eye?"

The blue eyes glowed. "You're the perfect lady's aid."

II

WARREN LESTER braked his borrowed Jaguar and pulled over to the curb in front of an enormous ornamental iron gate, set in a vine-covered stone wall, shortly after picking up Frances Ivy at Mrs. Allen's villa.

"If you don't mind, I'll run in for a second to check with Chico on our rendezvous in Tangier."

As he disappeared through the gate, the redhead stepped out of

the automobile and began a minute examination of its streamlined length. She lingered for some time over the car's springs and fenders.

By the time Warren and his matador friend appeared at the huge iron gate, Frances was back in the front seat, smoking a cigarette.

Chico said, "I am depending on you, Frances, to keep this speed demon down to ninety miles an hour. I'm not worried about the car or its driver. The former is heavily insured and the latter leads a charmed life. I just don't want a beautiful Titian-tressed corpse on my conscience."

Warren chuckled as he slid behind the wheel. "Don't worry, my bull-tossing amigo, your souped-up toy will be treated with far more loving care than usual. I'm a lot more concerned about my passenger's safety than you are."

He gazed appreciatively at Frances as they got under way. The redhead sighed as she remembered why she was making this trip with the handsome blond giant at her side.

"I hate to talk about mundane matters on such a heavenly day," she said, "but I would like to know a few things."

"Right you are, beautiful. Fire away."

"Tell me what you know about Charlie Forgan's death."

"Charlie had convulsions at the Turkish Houka Club, in Tangier. He was rushed to the nearest hospital, but was pronounced dead on arrival."

"Who hosted the party the night Charlie died?"

"Walter and Dysie Cameron. It just happened to be their turn. Our gang alternates on these deals; a different hostess each trip."

Frances Ivy sat in silence as the car passed through a lane of olive trees, with silver leaves shimmering in the sun. Warren studied his passenger with pleasure. His eyes were feasting on the delicately etched profile and auburn tresses when the object of his scrutiny turned and met his gaze squarely.

"Warren," she said abruptly, "I'm going to give you a chance to avoid a ten-year stretch in a Spanish jail for smuggling. But you'll have to help me break up this illegal traffic and track down the person who killed Charlie Forgan."

The car swerved dangerously before the driver's conditioned reflexes brought it under control. He gaped at her, open-mouthed. "You're joking, of course."

"I can assure you that I am not."

He braked the car, started to pull over to the side of the road.

"Get this car under way," Frances Ivy said. "I don't want the others to come along and see us parked."

He obeyed the order like a man

in shock. As the car picked up speed Frances said, "I could have waited and exposed you tonight, when we go through the customs at Algecirus, on the way home, but I intend to give you a break. You'd come out of jail a hardened criminal and I think you're worth saving. However, even a youngster like you should know what a horendous thing it is to smuggle dope."

Warren made a visible effort to pull himself together. "You're either making an uncannily shrewd guess or you've got the dope on our smuggling racket, but believe me, you are one hundred percent wrong about my transporting dope. I've been bringing in gold and I can prove it."

Frances was silent for a moment. "I had a hunch Chico didn't tell you what your principal cargo was on these smuggling trips. You're carrying gold, of course, but it is a cover-up for a far more profitable and more sinister traffic. Obviously, Chico never allows you to see the cars loaded or unloaded."

"So you even know that Chico is the boss," Warren said. "How did—" He stopped. "Me and my big mouth. I tipped you off by saying that we all borrowed Chico's fast cars. You deduced the rest from our regular caravans to Tangier and return. I'll have to hand it to you, Frances. Chico's plan completely fooled the Spanish customs authorities. We've never been searched on any of our trips."

He stole another look at his passenger. "You've made an amazingly clever guess about the smuggling, but you're all wet about the dope. I would have known if we had been carrying anything but gold."

"I've got a lot more than guesswork to go on," said the redhead. "I examined this car while you were in Chico's house getting your last-minute instructions. It didn't take me long to recognize the double springs. I helped the border authorities round up a gang who were transporting gold from the United States into Canada. Their cars had the same reinforced springs to keep the car from sagging when it was loaded with heavy ingots.

"However, those cars did not have the deeply indented fenders this Jaguar has. That's a clever new gimmick. You must be carrying a fortune in dope each trip, in these hollow fenders."

Warren shot a quick glance at the rearview mirror, saw that no following car was in sight and turned the Jaguar on to a side road.

"I'll prove you're wrong about the dope," he said as they jounced along. "I've seen the welded fittings they strap the gold to, but those fenders are not hollow. I'm going to convince you of that, right now."

He drove down the lane until he was sure the car would not be ob-

served from the highway before pulling off onto the grass. Yanking a lap-robe from the back seat, he placed it beneath the automobile. A moment later he was on his back.

Frances Ivy crawled in beside him. She reached up and tapped the fender. It gave off a hollow sound. She pointed to an almost concealed cap. Warren wiped the dust from the cap and, after considerable exertion, managed to unscrew it.

The redhead took the cap from him and rubbed a finger over its inside surface. "There are still traces of whatever dope you hauled on your last trip."

She tasted the fine white powder and made a wry grimace. "Cocaine," she said. "I've helped confiscate too much of this horrible stuff not to know what it is."

Warren's face was gray under his tan. He shoved a finger into the aperture, up to the knuckle. Withdrawing the coated digit, he tasted the white substance.

"This stuff tastes deadly, whatever it is. Makes my tongue feel funny." He rapped his knuckles against the fender. "It's hollow, all right."

His head dropped back on the lap-robe and he stared vacantly at the bottom of the car. "My God! Dope running! How low can a guy sink?"

III

AS HE LAY on his back, staring sightlessly at the Jaguar's underchassis, young Lester felt the figure beside him stir. Removing his eyes from the car's underpinnings, he gazed at the recumbent girl. Despite the shock of his discovery, his pulse quickened at the nearness of that beautiful body.

The blue eyes peered at him sympathetically. He automatically reached for the redhead at his side and she, just as automatically, edged away.

"Put the cap back in place quickly," she said. "We must get back on the road before anyone suspects what we have discovered."

Warren screwed the cap back into the fender. He turned in time to see Frances slip out from under the car with an involuntary display of silk stockings and creamy flesh that set his heart pounding.

He placed the lap-robe back in the car. Frances Ivy said, "Keep quiet about this. This is not a game we're playing. We've got a murderer to catch."

Her words jolted Warren back to

reality. He shuddered. "Would you mind driving for a while?" he said. "I feel sick."

The redhead nodded understandingly and slipped behind the wheel. As she drove along the dirt road, through groves of orange trees in blossom, Warren took deep gulps of the fragrant air. She noted that his color was improving.

Frances was edging the car back onto the main highway just as Mrs. Allen's Rolls Royce came into view. She waited for it to pass and smiled ruefully at the expression on Connie's face as her hostess took note of the change of drivers—and the return from a detour down a country lane.

The rest of the drive to the ferry slip at Algecirus was made in silence. It was not until Frances had jockeyed the car onto the boat and turned off the motor that Warren spoke.

"I'm glad you loafed along and missed the auto-ferry the rest of the caravan caught," he said. "We've got a lot of talking to do before we join the crowd. I want to alert you to everything I know about Chico's operation."

He paused a moment to gather his thoughts. "It all started about a year ago, when Chico returned to Torremolinos following his debut in Madrid, as Spain's youngest matador. He began to spend a lot of time with Charlie Forgan and me between appearances in the bull ring. He said that our offbeat way of life and happy-go-lucky attitude appealed to him. The guy had been tagging along with us for a couple of months before he propositioned Charlie on the idea of using us to help him smuggle gold into Spain from North Africa's free ports.

"He told us that he had bribed Baron Rode's pilot to introduce him to one of Rode's former African contacts, a man who fell out with him over a division of the spoils. Chico also said that the pilot contacted an international fence for him, in Madrid. According to our money-happy matador, Rode's pilot advised him to hire professional runners, but our friend decided to get his ne'er-do-well drinking pals to do the job for peanuts. These caravans made the venture a cinch. We take them about twice a month. The authorities think of all of us as rich and slightly slaphappy Americans."

Frances said," It goes without saying that the automobiles were loaded with contraband while you and Charlie were partying and sightseeing. How does Chico manage that?"

"We park the cars in a building in the heart of the Casbah. Chico bought it and transformed it into a bachelor hideaway. The place has garage space for a half-dozen automobiles. We use taxis to get around town. Chico's explanation to our friends for the switch to taxis is plausible to anyone who has ever

lived in or visited Tangier. Everyone knows that most of the natives will steal anything they can pry loose. It's no secret that Chico's cars are very expensive.

"After the party, we taxi over to Chico's place, pick up the cars and drive back to the Minzah Hotel for our dates. They always go back to their rooms to tidy up. Then we set out for the auto-ferry. Once past the customs at Algecirus we deliver our girls to their various apartments in Torremolinos, then go on to Granada. Chico has another bachelor hideout there—complete to garage, of course. Charlie and I left our cars there and drove back to Torremolinos in a Cadillac Chico keeps in Granada. Our matador friend stayed on to direct the next step in the project.

"Incidentally, we never did find out what happened between Granada and the eventual delivery in Madrid. Not that we cared. All Charlie and I cared about was the five hundred American dollars we divided after each trip."

Warren Lester met the redhead's gaze unflinchingly. "Believe me, Frances, I didn't know about any dope."

Her voice was soothing. "I know you didn't, Warren. Let's concentrate on cleaning up this mess. Do you have any idea who killed your friend?"

Warren sighed. "Only a wild guess. One thing I'm sure of, Charlie was killed by mistake. Chico must have been the intended target. Anyone who wanted to knock off Charlie would have managed it so they could hijack the cargo. A slow poison would be completely useless for that purpose. My guess is that one of Rode's hirelings botched the job. The baron is the biggest operator in Europe. He probably decided to eliminate Chico before he became a threat to his enterprises."

He hesitated briefly. "Lola Montaya says that Rode is much too big an operator to risk his neck by having a small-time competitor knocked off. She thinks Armand Dupre is smuggling contraband into and out of that fortified villa of his via his seagoing yacht and some of the fishing boats that ply the Mediterranean coast."

Warren managed a small smile. "Lola even has a crazy idea that Walter Cameron is masterminding Armand's operations. Nuttier still, she thinks that Walter personally tried to kill Chico. She bases her theory on the fact that the Camerons spend a lot of time on the rug-peddler's yacht. I think that idea is a howl, but it's obvious that Cameron's phoney desperado act has gone over big with Lola."

"What about Chico Bustamente? He must have some sort of theory."

He grinned sardonically. "Chico's solution is even fruitier. He says smuggling has nothing to do with Charlie's death. He is con-

vinced that Lola's Turkish husband poisoned Charlie because he was playing around with his wife.

Warren cast a sidelong glance at the redhead. "Cripes, Charlie and I took turns escorting Lola to parties and we both hung around her villa in Torremolinos while Hassan was away, but the idea that he would bump off either of us because of jealousy is ridiculous. I run into Hassan often in Barcelona and other places. He's always with a flashy babe. He and Lola have been playing around on their own, for years."

Frances had difficulty stifling a smile. "One thing you'll eventually learn, Casanova. Philandering husbands are not tolerant of their wives' missteps. But, we have more important things to talk about. Tell me, did any of the suspects you've mentioned have the opportunity to poison your friend immediately prior to the twenty-four hour period it takes the drug to act?"

"Everyone I pointed out to you at Connie's pool binge had the opportunity. They all attended a party given by Lola and Hassan at her Alhambra cave. The time element fits perfectly. Her parties are very informal. The guests take turns playing bartender and passing out hors d' oeuvres. The food is usually catered from the Alhambra Palace Hotel in Granada.

"Lola won't allow her gypsy help to touch the food or the glasses during her parties, for obvious reasons. They're a grubby lot. She knows her guests don't share her tolerance for unwashed hands."

"You say most of the food is catered by a hotel. What are the exceptions and how about the wines?"

"For one thing, Hassan is very proud of a concoction called hashish fudge that he whips up for every party. I must admit it's a tasty dish and it carries a mild wallop. Most of the Turks know how to make the stuff. It's harmless enough, but you can get a pleasant jag on if you eat enough of it. As for the wines, Lola has one of the finest cellars in Spain. No caterer around here can match her stock."

The jar of the auto-ferry being warped into the slip on the Tangier side interrupted him.

Frances started the motor. "I want you to go through with tonight's smuggling operation, as planned. No one concerned must suspect that I know anything."

Warren turned bleak eyes toward her.

"Don't worry," Frances said. "I won't tip off the customs authorities. Seizing one shipment would spoil my entire campaign. Also, a customs arrest would scare off the murderer. You can trust me, Warren. I won't let you down." She leaned over and kissed his cheek lightly.

Warren took a deep breath. "I'm with you all the way, Frances."

IV

AS FRANCES and Warren Lester were being ushered to their places at Mrs. Allen's table in *The Harem,* it became apparent that the news of their detour had made the rounds.

The smiles that greeted their appearance ranged from conspiratorial to embarrassed. Walter Cameron was the only one to voice the general speculation. He waited until Warren had seated the redhead and taken his place beside her before addressing Frances.

"That trip you two took down a country lane cost me a hundred bucks, Miss Ivy," he said with a leer. "I gave Hassan odds that our local Lothario wouldn't add your scalp to his trophies for at least forty-eight hours."

Frances Ivy placed a restraining hand on Warren's arm and smiled sweetly at the bewhiskered writer.

"I can see now why you've never made the best-seller list, Mr. Cameron. Your idea of humor is pitifully dated. The country lane ploy went out with bladder-wielding comics, Minsky's Burlesque and Joe Miller's Joke Book."

The muscles under her hand relaxed as a roar of laughter swept the table.

Baron Rode shouted, "Bravo! Our pistol-toting literary pretender is hoist on his own petard." He eyed Cameron insolently. "Incidentally, my beatnik friend, just what sort of thing *do* you write? It's obvious from our limited vocabulary and crude personal habits that your efforts must be aimed at teenage carriers of switchblades and adults with retarded mental development."

The bearded face turned brick red. The writer's eyes blazed as he half rose from his chair. Dysie Cameron shot her husband a warning look and broke in hurriedly with a frantic account of their day's adventures in the Casbah.

Cameron stared at the redhead and back at Rode through slitted eyes, shrugged elaborately and turned to Lola Montya, on his left. She was soon giggling over his sotto-voce comments. The conversation around the table broke up into fragmentary exchanges between small groups and Mrs. Allen breathed a sigh of relief. It had looked for a moment as though her dinner party might erupt into violence.

Frances studied the faces of the men at the table as she joined in the idle chatter. Baron Rode's piercing black eyes twinkled as they met hers. Chico threw her a kiss and made a V-for-Victory sign. Armand Dupre's profile was all she could see. He was concentrating on Dysie Cameron's flow of conversation. She encountered the probing gaze of Sulam Hassan and restrained an impulse to cover her bodice with her hands. To her dismay, she found herself blushing

furiously as the Turk's eyes continued to undress her.

Warren's chuckle furnished a welcome distraction. "I can see by that very becoming blush that the terrible Turk has been giving you the once-over impolitely with those X-Ray eyes of his. Now you know how the beautiful slave girls on the auction block must have felt."

Frances gave a little shudder of distaste. "I've never felt so nude in public. It's like a nightmare where you find yourself stark naked in the middle of a church festival."

Warren's voice cut in. She heard him say, "Pardon me for just a moment, honey. Be right back," and watched him edge his way through the tables and across the dance floor. She followed his progress and saw Walter Cameron disappear behind the orchestra stand, with Warren in his wake.

Slipping away from the table, Frances dashed through a long hall lined with potted palms and arrived at the front door in time to see Warren hustling the bearded author down the dark street, with one hand on his collar and the other clutching the seat of his pants.

In the dim light she could see Warren release his grasp, hurl the struggling Cameron against a high stone wall and step back. Frances slipped into the dark shadows of the narrow street and came up behind Cameron, unobserved by either of the men.

Warren said, "Okay, you loudmouthed creep. I'll give you thirty seconds to get out of your coat and ready for action."

She saw a dagger appear as if by magic in Cameron's upraised hand and struck his arm sharply from behind. The blow deflected the hurtling steel blade. Warren watched with mouth agape as the weapon whizzed by. He stood rooted to the street for a moment before rushing toward his assailant.

Cameron half turned. His hand darted under his coat. With a feeling of utter helplessness, the advancing Warren saw the hand emerge with a pistol.

Frances Ivy, still unobserved by either of the belligerents, brought the heel of her hand down smartly against the base of Cameron's neck. He crumpled to the street, the suddenly released pistol clattering noisily on the cobblestones.

The redhead stepped out of the shadows, bent over swiftly and picked up the pistol.

"My gallant knight," she said softly. "You should have listened to Lola. This man is dangerous. I saw murder in his eyes when Rode insulted him at the table. That's why his wife distracted him so frantically and that's why I followed you out here. You don't fight a walking arsenal and a compulsive killer with your bare hands. It's suicide."

She threw the pistol far into the

night. "If I were you," she said, "I'd frisk Cameron before he comes to. He may have other weapons concealed somewhere. Incidentally I'm sure he doesn't know who or what hit him. Let's try to keep it that way. I'll slip back into the club before he regains consciousness."

Frances ran toward the club and disappeared through the still ungarded entrance. Warren began a careful search of the recumbent figure. He whistled softly as his probing fingers touched cold steel. A moment later he was staring at a small derringer and a dangerous looking switchblade knife.

Warren Lester muttered. "This girl is uncanny. She's called every shot."

"Tossing both weapons into the shadows, he retraced his steps and was shrugging into his coat as the turbaned doorman of the club returned from the parking chore that had absented him from his post.

Warren glanced at the still recumbent figure and beckoned to the attendant. The doorman approached, took a close look at the now stirring writer and grinned.

Cameron rose unsteadily to his feet. The doorman said, "I don't suppose I could persuade you gentlemen to go another round or two? Things have been rather dull around here tonight."

Cameron's first move was toward his now empty shoulder holster.

The door man hissed something unintelligible and whipped a scimitar from the folds of his burnoose.

"Easy there, mister. We don't allow gunplay around here. Just take your hand away from there slow and easy, before I split your skull with this."

As Cameron's hand came away slowly, the attendant said, "That's better." Scimitar in hand, he closed in carefully, threw back Cameron's coat and ran his hands over the empty holster. After patting him from shoulder to ankle, he stepped back.

Cameron bellowed, "I want this man and his accomplices arrested for assault and robbery! I've got a permit to carry the gun that was in this holster. We came out here to settle our differences like gentle-

men and his cut-throat pals jumped me from behind."

He glared at the attendant. "You must have seen those men jump me."

The doorman eyed him coldly. "I have seen no one but you and this gentleman."

"I insist that you search this man," Cameron blustered. "He took my gun after his cohorts hit me from behind."

The attendant winked at Warren, as he replaced the scimitar in his sash. "Do I have your permission to search you, sir?"

Warren lifted his arms. The man patted him expertly from shoulder to ankle, straightened up and cast a look of contempt at the accuser.

"This gentleman has no weapons."

The frisked Warren Lester smiled happily, took two steps forward, feinted Cameron into raising his hands, sank his right into his midriff and swung a left hook with the weight of his entire body behind it.

Cameron went down for the second time that night.

The doorman waved away the bill that Warren proffered. "I owe you money," he said. "You've brightened up my entire evening."

V

FRANCES IVY and Warren were doing a neat samba when they caught a glimpse of Dysie Cameron hurriedly following a pageboy across the floor and into the foyer of the club.

"A message from Two-Gun Walter, no doubt," said Warren. "What a pity the dear boy won't be around to enjoy Torremolinos's favorite dessert, Hassan's hashish fudge."

He pointed to a covey of waiters, who were placing a number of ornately carved silver bowls on the table. Frances followed his gaze and saw Lola Montaya and Connie Allen moving about, directing the efforts of the servitors and vainly trying to shoo away the guests who were sampling the delicacies as they shuttled back and forth between the table and the dance floor.

Warren grinned as he watched Connie playfully slap Armand Dupre's hand after he had maneuvered his way from the floor to the table with one of the club's pretty hostesses and grabbed a handful of the goodies en transit.

Lola was delivering a similarly good natured slap to Baron Rode's fudge-filled hand and shaking a reproving finger at Chico.

"It's amazing how Torremolinos's upper crust goes for that stuff," Warren said. 'I can't figure whether it's tasty, which it certainly is, or because everyone feels there's something delightfully naughty about eating a sweet that's flavored with a forbidden drug."

Frances Ivy turned again and

watched the sporadic raids on the dessert.

Her brow furrowed for a moment.

"Isn't it like bringing coals to Newcastle for Lola to cart all of that candy from her home to Tangier? I understand every night spot in the casbah, including this one, serves hashish fudge on request."

Warren shrugged. "Everyone in our gang thinks that Hassan's fudge has more bounce to the ounce than the local variety. Frankly, I can't find any difference.

"It all gives me the same slightly slaphappy lift that I get from smoking marijuana."

He chuckled at his partner's expression. "Don't look so disapproving, honey. Even my family doctor admits that neither marijuana nor hashish is habit-forming."

Frances smiled absentmindedly and continued to watch Mrs. Allen's dinner guests take light-fingered dips into the silver receptacles as they danced slowly by the table.

The redhead's face suddenly settled into sober lines. "For your information, Warren," she said, "thousands of poor devils have acquired a taste for stronger, more deadly narcotics by using marijuana and hashish. Don't let anyone, not even a doctor tell you that they're not dangerous."

Warren gazed down into the blue eyes as the music stopped. "Okay, beautiful," he said, as they walked off the dance floor. "I'll add hashish and marijuana to my list of forbidden fruits."

As Warren was pulling out her chair at the table, Frances said, "Lean over and listen to me carefully, as soon as you sit down. Be careful and don't show surprise when you hear what I have to say," she murmured, as Warren bent his head toward her. "Do not —repeat—do not eat the fudge placed before you at the table. It's a hundred to one bet that it is poisoned."

She smiled flirtatiously as she gazed into Warren's suddenly guarded eyes.

"Don't tighten up," she cautioned. "Act naturally. We're being watched. Give me the gallant cavalier routine for a few moments, then head across the floor as though you were going to the little boys' room. When you're out of sight, slip into the kitchen, buy a half-dozen pieces of the club's hashish fudge and come back here. Be sure no one of our crowd sees you go into or out of the kitchen. Keep the fudge in your right-hand coat pocket—repeat—right coat pocket. Now, go into your romance act, Lothario."

Warren's involuntary snort of laughter at the word 'Lothario', was spontaneous enough to convince anyone. He leaned closer,

kissed a pink-tipped ear and whispered, "This is the easiest role I've ever had to play, honey."

Frances's blush was equally spontaneous. The two kept their heads close together for a few moments before Warren made his apologies and headed across the dance floor.

He was back in a surprisingly short time. Frances turned her head so the watchful eyes at the other end of the table could not see her lips move.

"Wait until you see me reach for a piece of fudge and bite into it before you take the third piece from the left and eat it. Remember, the third piece from the left. After we've finished eating the fudge, ask me to dance."

Warren kept up a light banter for the next few moments. His table companion responded with some properly spaced giggles and low-voiced chatter. He tried not to show his amazement as Frances took a piece of fudge daintily from the silver dish and nibbled on it. Her sleight of hand had been so deft that he hadn't felt or seen the transfer she must have made.

He grinned happily at the redhead, took the piece of fudge she had designated and popped it into his mouth. They both munched with obvious enjoyment before Warren rose from the table, helped Frances slide her chair back and ushered her onto the dance floor.

Frances Ivy shook her head slightly as her partner started to speak.

"I'll tell you all about it when we are alone," she whispered. "Let's act as though we don't have a care in the world."

They were putting the finishing touches to a torrid carioca when Chico danced alongside with Connie Allen.

The two couples moved closer together. The matador said, "There's been a slight change in plans, old boy. Baron Rode wants us all to stay a couple of days in that mansion of his before we return to Torremolinos. We'll just leave the cars at his place and use taxis until we're ready to roll."

Warren looked surprised as he and Frances continued to dance within speaking range of the other couple.

"That doesn't sound like you," he said. "I had the distinct impression that you detested Rode."

The matador laughed. "I thought it might be amusing to beard the lion in his den. I needled the Baron into asking all of us to be his house guests by making several rather snide remarks about his lack of hospitality."

He chuckled. "I even went so far as to hint that the Baron must have something to hide on his Tangier estate, since he was so careful not to invite any of his Torremolinos friends to visit him. That did it."

They were on the way to the table when Baron Rode approached them. He bowed low over Frances's hand.

"I want to invite you personally to be a guest in my Tangier home," he said. "The rest of Mrs. Allen's party have already accepted. I hope you and Mr. Lester will make it unanimous."

The blue eyes twinkled at him. "I shall be delighted, but I can't speak for Mr. Lester."

Rode chuckled. "With you in my home, it would take an armed guard to keep my good friend Mr. Lester away."

Warren met Rode's eyes. "You are so right, Baron."

VI

IT WAS A frustrating night for young Lester. He had curbed his curiosity during the balance of the dinner party, in the hope that he and Frances would share a taxi, enroute to Baron Rode's estate. The baron stymied that wish by bundling them both into his Rolls Royce.

Frances Ivy found their titled host an intelligent and witty conversationalist. She was amused to note, after their arrival at the huge, sprawling mansion, that Warren patently resented the manner in which Rode monopolized her attentions. The baron was polite but firm in his insistence on personally escorting her, as they led the group on a tour of the brightly illuminated estate.

Rode glanced back at the trailing Warren and winked at the redhead as the party halted to admire a striking vista of hanging gardens bathed in indirect lighting.

"How the mighty hath fallen," he murmured. "Every beauty in Torremolinos has been panting after Mr. Lester since his arrival, three years ago. Now, he is doing the panting. The poor boy looks like a baffled basset-hound."

The arrival of Connie Allen at her side saved Frances the necessity of a reply.

Connie said, "Come now, Carl. Don't you think we've had enough of the grand tour. Do you realize what time it is? We can see the rest of your estate after a night's sleep."

Rode's laugh was apologetic. "Of course, my dear. I truly am sorry. Having a charmer like Miss Ivy by my side caused me to lose all track of time. I'll have Mustapha and his staff show you to your rooms."

He bent and kissed Frances's hand with a flourish. "I hope you will do me the honor to sit at my right when you awaken and join the rest of us for brunch in the fountain patio."

Lola and Hassan joined the group. Lola said, "These grounds are endless, Herr Baron. What, in heaven's name, does a lone bachelor like you want with such an enormous estate?"

Chico laughed heartily. "Lola darling, how can you be so naive? Carl may be a bachelor, but he is anything but lone. It's an open secret in Tangier that he has the most luscious harem in Africa bottled up somewhere within these walls."

Armand Dupre drifted up in time to hear Chico Bustamente's remark. He flashed him an oily smile.

"From what I have seen of your estate, Herr Baron, it would be an ideal spot for a man who knows he has only twenty-four hours to live. A sort of prelude to heaven, you might say."

Rode's eyes slitted. He gave the speaker a look of venomous dislike. "I consider that remark in very poor taste, Dupre. Everyone here knows how Mr. Forgan died. His tragic death is not a joking matter!"

Dupre made soothing noises. "Please believe me, Herr Baron. I was not referring to the unfortunate death of our young friend. The phrase, 'If I had twenty-four hours to live', is one of my favorite cliches."

Mrs. Constance Allen deliberately created a diversion by remarking on the absence of the Camerons.

Dupre said smoothly, "The Camerons will be here, tomorrow. Walter has an early-morning appointment in the city. He and Dysie thought it would be much more sensible to stay at the Hotel Minzah tonight."

Warren lingered at the door of the suite Frances was to occupy, as the major domo and a bevy of servants continued on with the other guests.

She waited until the last of the group was out of sight before whispering, "You and I are going to have a little talk with Baron Rode. Please go downstairs to the drawing room and wait there. I'll call the baron as soon as you leave and ask him to join me there."

Warren ambled away without asking for an explanation. He had arrived at the point where the redhead's word was law.

Frances Ivy slipped into the suite, closed her door and headed for the telephone. It was only a moment before the servant who answered her call, put Rode on the phone. She wasted no time on amenities.

"Please meet me in the drawing room as soon as possible," she said. "It is a matter of the utmost importance." She replaced the receiver before he could answer.

The redhead suppressed a smile as she walked into the drawing room and saw the two men, standing side by side, on one of the room's lush Persian rugs. Warren looked ill at ease. Rode peered at her quizzically.

Rode was the first to speak. "I admire your courage, young lady,

but you are not living up to your reputation as a clever detective by bearding the lion in his own den, as you are at this moment."

He clapped his hands sharply and four husky men in flowing robes left the concealment of drapes. Two of the men seized Warren's arms, twisted them behind him and encased his wrists in handcuffs. The others stood on either side of Frances, without touching her.

The baron looked at her admiringly. "You are a cool one," he murmured. "My men have instructions not to rough you up unless you take a pistol or other weapon from that bag you are carrying. Incidentally, this room is soundproof. I must say, I am a wee bit disappointed. I expected you to be a much more stimulating adversary. You fell into my trap much too easily. You should have guessed that this house party was dreamed up especially for your benefit."

He grinned at the expression on Warren's face. "Yes, Mr. Lester, I am fully aware of Frances Ivy's identity and mission."

He turned to Frances, who gazed at him calmly.

"It distresses me to inform you, lovely lady, that I must dispose of you and your devoted friend. I have no choice. If I allow you to live, it will mean the total destruction of my underworld empire. There are billions, not millions

involved. You made a serious tactical error when you drove down that country lane—to examine the fenders on my partner's automobile. No one but a fool would think it was a romantic impulse."

"Your partner!" blurted Warren. "Chico told me that you and he were bitter enemies and he was cutting in on your rackets."

"That was clever of my matador associate. The less the hired hands know, the better, as you both can see at this moment. If you had remained in ignorance, it would not be necessary to kill you. By the way, your demise will be painless. You will be put to sleep, then placed in the Jaguar you used yesterday. The Tangier police will find your bodies in the burned out wreckage of the car."

Warren's voice was larded with contempt. "Why isn't my good friend Chico here for the kill?"

"I am afraid Senor Bustamente is the timid type, despite his reputation as a fearless matador. I happen to know that my associate dopes his bulls before they enter the arena. When he delivers the

final sword thrust, it is with very little danger to his person. He is as clever as the Borgias in the use of drugs."

"So that's it," said Warren. "Chico is the one who poisoned Charlie. He got it for the same reason you plan to kill us. Charlie found out we were transporting dope instead of gold. What I don't understand is why he didn't tip me off."

"Your friend thought it would be more profitable to blackmail Chico. The last twenty four hours of his life were happy ones. Senor Bustamente had promised to pay Charlie fifty thousand dollars if he kept the news to himself."

The baron shrugged expressively. "I am afraid we must terminate this conversation. My attendants will bind, gag and blindfold both of you. I will then awaken Senor Bustamente. He will come downstairs and inject the proper amount of soporific in your veins and we will be off for our rendezvous with death."

Rode spoke several words in Arabic. One of the men slipped a gag in Warren's mouth and tied a scarf over his eyes. As the man beside her whipped out a scarf, Frances said, "I think you had better examine the contents of my bag before you go any further, Herr Baron."

The baron shot the redhead a quick look and took the bag gingerly. "I don't fancy the idea of having my head blown off by a booby-trap," he said as he waved off the man who had started to bind the redhead. "I think you'd better open it. Don't put your hand inside. Just pour the contents gently onto that sofa."

Frances smiled, accepted the proffered bag, opened and upended it. She extended a hand tentatively toward the small bottle that had dropped from the bag, along with two small square objects wrapped in paper. She wasn't quick enough.

Rode picked up the vial before her hand touched it. "Now really, Miss Ivy," he said. "That routine is as corny as a grade-B movie. The heroine holds a bottle supposed to contain nitro in her hand and threatens to blow up the house if the hero is not released. *Ts'k, ts'k,* dear. You continue to disappoint me."

He examined the bottle curiously. "It certainly is not nitro. Suppose you tell me what it is."

Frances said, "I've been trying to tell you exactly what it is ever since I came into this room. That's why I phoned and asked you to meet me. You don't actually think I would be stupid enough to put my head in a noose without a reason, do you? I arranged this rendezvous to save your life—at a price, of course. I'll tell you what the price is, later."

Rode sneered. "Come now, my dear, you'll have to come up with

a more plausible story than that. Just what is in this bottle?"

"The vial you hold in your hand contains one half of the antidote necessary to counteract the poison you now have in your system, my gullible friend. Like the late Mr. Forgan, you are a walking corpse. I saw Chico switch your dessert in the club, last night."

She gestured toward the two small paper-wrapped parcels. "May I?"

Rode looked at her glassy-eyed for a moment, then nodded. She unwrapped one of the parcels. Rode's face turned ashen as he saw the brown candy she had uncovered.

"I took these two samples of Chico's handiwork. I intend to have them analyzed in Madrid. It's a million-to-one bet there's enough slow-acting poison in each of them to kill a whole arena of bulls."

The baron expelled a long, tremulous breath. "So that's what Dupre meant. I thought that remark about twenty-four hours to live was intended as an accusation. He wasn't hinting that I had killed young Forgan. He was telling me that I am Chico's second victim.

"Obviously my double-dealing partner planned to kill me, take over my setup and throw in with Armand."

He gave an eloquent shrug. "What now, Miss Ivy? I have a very natural desire to continue living. I am in your hands."

The blue eyes gazed at him impassively. "First things first, Herr Baron. Have your men remove the handcuffs from Mr. Lester's wrists and the gag from his mouth. Order a glass of brandy. As soon as my friend is comfortable, we can get down to the business of saving your life."

She waited until Warren had gulped most of the brandy and was rubbing his wrists before speaking.

"The other ingredient necessary to save your life, Herr Baron, is in the office of the gendarmerie in Torremolinos. It has been there since I left Madrid. I obtained the antidotes from the doctors who performed the autopsies on Chico's victim. Incidentally, I worked on this case undercover for two weeks before I became a house guest of Mrs. Allen's and deliberately made myself a vulnerable target."

Frances smiled sweetly. "I tell you this, Herr Baron, so you will not continue to be disappointed at my failure to furnish you with a worthy adversary."

A slight pause lent emphasis to her next words.

"Both of the ingredients that will save your life must be used within twelve hours of the time the poison enters your system. That doesn't give us much time. I suggest you take this bottle upstairs and drink its contents. You will be

very uncomfortable for about two minutes. When you have recovered sufficiently, awaken your pilot and have him warm up the helicopter. We have no time to lose in getting to Torremolinos and the rest of the antidote. I would suggest that you come down here after phoning your pilot and send for Senor Bustamente."

Rode spoke a few words to his men and left the room with one of them. The hand that held the vial was white with strain.

Frances sat down beside Warren on the sofa. The three remaining men huddled in a corner of the huge room. He gazed at her dazedly for a few moments.

"Honey, I'll bet you play a whiz of a chess game," he said finally. "You've been a half dozen moves ahead of me and everybody else."

They sat in silence until their host, looking pale and shaken, but determined, returned to the room.

"My pilot is warming up the helicopter," he said and picked up the receiver of the telephone at his elbow.

There was a short buzz and Rode spoke into the phone. "I want to see you, Chico. Come down to the drawing room as soon as possible. It's important."

As Bustemente entered the room, two of Rode's men seized him. "What is the meaning of this?" Chico shouted. "Have you gone mad?" He tried to shake off the burly attendants

"My tricky friend, you have reached the end of your rope," his host replied. "Within the hour you and I will be in the Torremolinos police station, thanks to your bungling attempt to kill me."

"You idiot!" shouted the struggling matador, "can't you see that this woman is trying to save her own skin by pitting us against each other? Why in heaven's name would I try to murder you? You must have lost your mind."

Baron Rode looked at him somberly for a moment, walked over and picked up the unwrapped piece of hashish fudge.

"Open your mouth wide, Chico," he commanded. "This is one of the pieces of fudge Miss Ivy saw you place on my plate at Mrs. Allen's dinner party."

He shoved the sweet toward the struggling matador's mouth. Chico turned his head away and tried frantically to free himself. One of his captors took the confection from the Baron's hand, pried open the clenched teeth and tried to shove the fudge into the quivering mouth.

Chico Bustamente jerked his head away and spat like a terrified cat. One of his captors clamped fingers on the matador's shock of black hair and yanked the writhing lips back into range.

The struggling youth shrieked, "Mercy! Mercy!" as his jaws were forced open for the second time. Twisting away momentarily from

the viselike grip on his jaw, he burst into hysterical sobs.

Frances saw Rode's face turn chalk white as he looked at his panic stricken partner and turned to face her. The naked fear in his eyes told her that he finally accepted the truth of her story without reservations.

He clapped his hands sharply and emitted a staccato of Arabic sounds. The men ceased to manhandle their victim. One of them slipped the same handcuffs Warren had worn, onto Bustamente's wrists. The other threw the mangled remains of the confection into a wastebasket.

Turning back to the redhead, the baron bowed ceremoniously. "Allow me to escort you to my plane. For the first time in my life I find myself dying to keep a rendezvous with the police."

He drew his lips back into a thin caricature of a smile. "A poor pun, I am afraid, but not nearly so poor as my judgment in rating you as an unworthy adversary. I am mortally embarrassed."

Read: In the November issue of THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. MAGAZINE:

THE THRUSH FROM THRUSH AFFAIR

A New Complete NAPOLEON SOLO and ILLYA KURYAKIN Novel

by ROBERT HART DAVIS

Here, for your exclusive reading enjoyment, is the spy-mystery sensation of video and now the reading field—THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. MAGAZINE! Each month a complete novel, written for YOU! Don't wait! Buy it now!

A Spine-Chilling Manhunt to the Death

by JOSEPH GREEN

Somewhere on that desolate island my enemy waited. It was a grim game we played. The winner would have life and a beautiful bride. The loser's bones would rot unmourned. And suddenly, in the still darkness, I heard Sam Hogarth coming.

Fight On Hurricane Island

I LOOKED AT his big frame, at the handsome blond head that stood higher than mine by a good four inches, at his easy, relaxed attitude, and I was afraid.

"Jeremy, the time has come to settle this thing between us," Samuel Hogarth said. "I always knew it would come to this some day. When we fought as children and you always beat me, I knew one day you and I would meet again face to face, man to man, and the story would have a different ending." He paused a moment, then went on earnestly. "That time has come. This will be our final meeting."

I was a year older than Sam and had been larger until our fifteenth year, when he had caught and passed me. Now I looked a runt beside him, and I am a normal five feet eleven and weigh a hundred and seventy pounds.

"What have you got on your mind, Sam? I have work to do."

"Jeremy, you've interfered between myself and Jessica once too often, and I won't stand for it. I give you a choice, which you can make now. Leave town and never come back—or meet me in a fight to the death!"

"You can't scare me out of town,

All too rarely a "manhunt" story of almost unbearable suspense comes along. Like "Rogue Male." Like "The Most Dangerous Game." This taut costume tale of death is their peer. We can think of no greater tribute.

Sam," I said from a throat suddenly gone dry. I took a deep breath and added, "Name your terms."

His heavy, serious face did not change. If the fact I accepted his challenge bothered him he hid it well. "Tomorrow morning at sun-up Bill Holly will set you ashore on the west end of Hurricane Island. You can take a knife, scabbard, belt, and pair of trousers. Nothing else. Send one of your friends to deliver me to the east end. Day after tomorrow at sun-up they come together to pick up the winner."

I thought it over for a moment and didn't like it any too well. Sam was a better woodsman than I, a better hunter and tracker. I had an edge on him in speed, both physically and mentally, but he was far stronger. He had always been a hard and stubborn fighter when he had an advantage over his opponent, and he would have several over me.

"Have you told Jessica about this?" I asked, proud that my voice did not tremble.

"Yes. She has agreed to marry the winner. I told her we were going to Hurricane Island to fight it out. The fact it's to the death need concern only ourselves and our seconds."

"You know, don't you, Sam, that duels are against the law in Florida and the winner, if caught, will most likely be prosecuted for murder?"

"Yes. No one will know. The loser will simply disappear."

"Except Jessica. She'll know all her life she married a murderer. *If* she'll still go through with it after the fight."

"The winner will tell her the loser left town."

"And start a marriage on a lie? The more I think of it, Sam, the less I like it."

"You have no choice," said Sam. His face was cold and hard. "If you won't meet me in a fair fight I'll kill you from ambush."

"It's that way, is it?"

"It's that way."

"How do I know, Sam, that you haven't stashed a gun or an extra knife somewhere on the island, giving you an unfair advantage?"

His mouth curled a little. I wished I hadn't said it. "I named Hurricane because it's the most convenient. Name another if you like. There are four or five more within ten miles of here."

"Hurricane will do," I said quickly.

"I'm glad you accept. Shooting you in the back wouldn't give me half the satisfaction I'll get from killing you in an open fight."

He turned and walked out of the store, not swaggering, not hurrying, moving with the casual, easy air he had adopted when his late growth made him the largest man in town.

It was a beautiful spring day in March, 1888. We had been talking

in the main room of Simpson's Mercantile Store, where I worked, during a lull in the usually brisk Saturday trade. Duels had been out of fashion in Florida for a long time, longer than my twenty-two years could remember. I had no wish to die in one, or in any other way.

But I knew Sam Hogarth, with the intimacy gained by a lifetime of association. He was not an ordinary man. He took his triumphs seriously and his defeats hard. When he lost, he sulked and worried for days. His folks were poor white trash living out in the sandhills, coming in to town on Saturday to swap a few vegetables and livestock for salt, cloth and other essentials.

Sam had begun improving his backwoods English at school and now spoke as well as my father, the Baptist preacher. Sam was apprenticed to Dodgeson, the blacksmith. His job gave him the means to live independently of his slovenly family. He had long ago left them to their own devices.

As the son of the small Gulf Coast town's only ordained minister, I was the expected wild one, always into more trouble than anyone of comparable age and usually getting caught at it. Of course no one doubted that my inherited goodness would win through one day and I'd become a fine, upstanding citizen.

I knew the townsfolk would have chosen Sam over me as a coming young man. But I understood him better than they. I was one of the few who knew of his hidden canker, who held as suspect the shifting, restless eyes that never met your own openly and fully, as though afraid to let another person peer into their cloudy depths. Those who knew Sam well didn't like him.

The sun was already kissing the western horizon and I had to hurry. Tomorrow we would both be off from work, which was as Sam had planned it. I had only a little time to choose a second and give him instructions.

Mr. Simpson returned from supper and I quit work for the day. I met Bill Holly, Sam's second, as I was leaving the store. We swiftly agreed to leave from the city pier at five sharp in the morning and I went on to look for Wallace Mathews, to ask him to be my second. Wally was one of the few who knew Sam as I did. When I found him, and repeated the challenge and the threat, he agreed to act for me.

I went home to supper and immediately afterwards hunted up the knife my grandfather had given me, a huge thing with the top half of the blade sharpened on both sides. The type was famous in the West, where Colonel Jim Bowie had made it popular. It was balanced and easy to throw, though I was far from expert.

I got out my father's whetrock

and sharpened the knife carefully, oiled the blade thoroughly, and put it away. It had come to me in a good scabbard and I had used it often before, though never for such a deadly purpose.

I did some careful choosing among my belts, finally taking one made of leather that was less ornamental than most but strong and new. In a pinch it would make a passable strangle rope. I was well aware that I might even now be deciding whether I lived or died on the morrow.

Almost any stout pair of trousers would do. I chose new ones which I could tear into strips for bandages if necessary. In a very few minutes I had my equipment about me and was ready for what the future might hold. The night stretched ahead of me, long and dismal.

I decided to visit Jessica.

Ten minutes later I walked up the gravel path of her family's house. The watchdog, to whom I was familiar, growled once and subsided, grumbling. I tapped firmly on the heavy oak panel of the door and there was a quick scurrying of feet inside, the sound of light steps approaching. The door opened wide, and Jessica stood framed in the lamplight.

II

JESSICA WAS small, fine-boned, graceful and resilient as a young willow. Her raven-black hair was pulled to the back of her finely shaped head and bound into a tight bun, prim and unbecoming. Her features were cleanly drawn, almost thin, and they made her dark brown eyes stand out, luminous and gloriously large. Her mouth was the only rich feature of her face.

Small, also, it was heart-shaped, with full, up-curving lips.

When she smiled something of her inner nature, the woman of fire and spirit, was there on the surface, laughing and joyous. When she held her mouth tight the happiness disappeared and she became a prim and dignified young woman, one with whom it would not pay to trifle.

Her bust was small but high and proud, holding its place without the aid of stays.

"Why, Jeremy! How nice to see you." Her voice was deeper than you would expect, yet womanly and soft. "Won't you come in?"

"Thank you," I said stiffly, and walked inside the spacious parlor. Her mother was dead and she and an older sister kept house for their father. That formidable gentleman was taking his ease in front of the fireplace, in which a small flame dispelled the chill of the night. He turned to greet me without rising, and motioned me to a chair by the fire.

I seated myself and made small talk, knowing the routine he invariably followed when I came court-

ing. He compelled me to sit by him for the best part of an hour while Jessica and her sister, Letty, prepared the house for bed. Letty was a pretty girl herself, though not in Jessica's class. That she disapproved of me, at least as a potential brother-in-law, she made very obvious.

Letty went to bed immediately after the housework was finished, but Mr. Appleton lingered over a final cup of coffee until past nine o'clock. Jessica had seated herself quietly behind us, away from the fire, taking almost no part in the conversation.

Mr. Appleton finally wearied of talking and rose to his feet, yawning broadly. "It's bedtime for the old folks, Jeremy. You'll have to excuse me for the night. Jessica, see that you're in bed by ten sharp."

The old gentlemen left us with no further words, and we were alone at last.

"Would you like to sit in the porch swing for a while?" I asked immediately. The night was only slightly cool and the Appleton's front porch overlooked Massalina Bayou, a lively sight in the moonlight. I had stolen many a sweet kiss under the spell of that golden beauty of water and light.

"I'd love to," said Jessica, smiling.

There was no moon shining. The night was overcast, dark clouds hanging heavily overhead, and you could hardly see the bayou at all. But it scarcely mattered. I was in no mood for the beauties of moonlight anyway.

"Jessica, Sam and I are going to Hurricane Island tomorrow to fight it out," I began abruptly, keeping my voice low. The bedrooms were in the rear of the house, but Letty was perfectly capable of sneaking into the parlor to eavesdrop. I'd caught her at it before.

"Yes, I know. I wish it didn't have to be this way, Jeremy, but you're a blot on the clean earth in Sam's sight, and he can't abide you. When he's whipped you I think it would be best for us all if you left town, at least for a few years."

Her words hit me like an unexpected blow. I could not have been more shocked if she had produced a gun and threatened me. Her calm, immediate acceptance of the fact that Sam would beat me, and her unconcern over it, were complete giveaways. She *wanted* Sam to win! I wondered, sitting in the swing by her side, if even knowing it was a fight to the death would have made her care.

And I had been fool enough to think, for the past year, that I was the leading contender for her hand, that only shyness had made her withhold her consent!

Slowly but powerfully, anger began to build up in me. I clamped a tight rein on the immediate, acute sense of loss and tried to decide

what course to steer in the light of this blinding revelation.

"If that's the way it is, I see no point in fighting Sam. You've picked him, win or lose tomorrow. We'll call off the fight. You can have him, with my blessing."

"No! No, Jeremy, you don't understand! You must fight Sam. You won't win—I couldn't expect you to—but there must be at least a fight. Sam must think he's won me —not that I fell into his hand."

The bitterness I had felt before was as nothing to the taste of gall that appeared in my mouth then. Acidly I asked. "What if I should win Jessica? Would you still marry me?"

"You won't, Jeremy. You couldn't. You're not the man Sam is."

I got to my feet and stood looking down at her. "I'm not going to fight Sam. It seems that you're his woman already. Why should I be beaten up just to satisfy his childish hate of me when I'd have nothing to gain? No, Sam can have you, and welcome."

She came swiftly to her feet. "I'll marry you if you win, Jeremy. I can say that because I'm sure you won't But you must fight."

I stood unmoving, letting it soak in. "Just why does this fight mean so much to you, Jessica?"

"I should think you'd know, Jeremy. It's Sam. He places no value in things that come easily. He doesn't know I love him, that I wouldn't dream of marrying anyone else. He must fight you, and beat you, and have me as his prize. That's the only way I'll mean a lot to him. Oh, I've known for months Sam was my choice. Every time you've kissed me this winter I've wished it was Sam holding me, Sam pleading with me, but I'm wise enough to know I mustn't come easily to him. If you love me, as you've said so often these past few months, you'll do what I ask, to help me get my marriage off to a good start."

"I *did* love you," I answered quickly and cruelly. "I couldn't say those three words now with a straight face."

A storm of emotion was raging wildly within me. I wanted to hurt her as she had hurt me. I turned and stepped to the edge of the porch, then whirled around to face her, small and silent in the shadows.

"All right, I'll fight Sam. And I'll kill him if I can. You thought this was to be a fist fight? The loser to leave town? Sam hasn't anything so childish in mind. This is to the death, Jessica. Only one of us will come back alive. He wants it that way and that's the way it will be. I'll bring his head back on a platter, and we'll start our happy life together by burying it under our doorstep."

I moved down the steps, stopping and turning again at the bottom. I wanted one more thrust, one more stabbing wound, and it came

to me in a few casual words. *"See you Monday, Jessica!"*

Even in the shadows I could see her bosom began to heave, see the enormous ovals of her eyes. She could not speak, only gasped a little as what I had said penetrated her heart. I turned and walked away.

III

I SLEPT a few hours, just before daylight, and the morning dawned cool and clear.

It was still a few minutes before five when I arrived at the dock. Bill Holly was already there. He checked me over quickly and asked me to leave my shirt and shoes behind. I did as he requested and faced the cool breeze bare-chested.

"The terms are clear," Bill explained apologetically, "and you got to follow 'em. Wally will be makin' Sam do the same."

I agreed without argument and seated myself, barefooted and half-naked, on one of the two rowing seats in the boat. Bill took the other and we pulled out and away from the rotten old dock.

Hurricane is a long narrow island, running east and west across the mouth of the circular bay. It was once connected to the mainland on the western side, but a hurricane battered the land with waves of such terrible force that the pounding water had made a channel close to the mainland and turned a peninsula into an island. Time and the tides had deepened this channel until it was navigable.

The island was almost two miles long but not over a quarter-mile wide at the center, its widest point. It still had the brush, scrub oak, palmetto, sawgrass and stunted pine that had grown on it when it was a part of the mainland. The water on the bay side was an excellent scalloping ground. During the summer we used to come over on swimming parties and scallop hunts. I was fairly familiar with the whole island. It was ideal for the type of duel we were to fight.

It was a full two miles across the bay and though we worked hard it took us an hour to row the distance against the incoming tide. I tried not to tire myself on the oars, but pulled heavily enough to drain the last vestiges of sleep from my muscles and get the blood circulating warmly through my body. When we reached the west end of the island, a light sheen of sweat had appeared on my skin and I felt awake and alert, intensely alive and ready for whatever might befall me.

Bill Holly rested his oars for a minute, then said hesitantly, "I can't wish ye' luck, Jeremy. I'm fer Sam. But I do hope he changes his mind and don't kill ye."

With that he backed the boat away from the sand beach and headed it towards the mainland.

I looked past him over the water, the two miles of clear green beauty between myself and the town,

where I saw the steeple of my father's church standing tall in the Sunday morning sunlight. Then I turned to face the shadowy silences of Hurricane Island. The beach at the west end was a long one, a full hundred feet of open, untouched sand. Once I crossed that open stretch and entered the shadows of the stunted pines my life was in my own hands.

I was not fool enough to think Sam would show me any mercy. Whether or not I would show mercy to him, should I conquer, was a matter that had been tormenting my mind since I left the Appleton house in such bitter anger the night before. I felt that I owed Jessica nothing. Her acid words had dissolved the feeling I had for her which I had thought imperishable. Yet, a love such as mine was not something you could discard like a worn-out glove. In a strange, bittersweet way I found myself almost wanting the affair to end the way she desired it, in order that she might have her Sam.

The years would take vengeance for me in the wreck of their marriage. Another, equally bitter thought was for me to kill Sam and return, bloody and triumphant, to claim my bride. *That* would be a marriage made in heaven!

The irony of this weird tangle was that there was no way I could win Jessica, if I still wanted her. If I won the fight, her love for Sam would remain undiminished. Only marriage to him and slow, gradual revelation over a span of years could dim such a bright flame. She would marry me in body, as promised, but her heart would have died with Sam. If I lost I would win neither Jessica nor any other woman.

I paced the short hundred feet to the edge of the woods, then turned and looked back on my footprints clearly showing in the sand. There was no point in erasing them. Sam knew where I was supposed to land and I would leave no tracks after entering the brush.

During the short seconds of the walk I had decided what I wanted to do. Jessica could have her Sam, for my part of it, but not on her terms. I was going to beat Sam, and beat him good, but not kill him. Then he could go home to Jessica and tell her anything he liked. I would never show my face in town again to dispute his story.

I was tired of Bay City, and had been wanting for months to tear myself away from its smothering confines and see something of the world. Only the thought of the sweetness of Jessica, of what marriage with her could be, had kept me chained. And now that chain was broken.

One thing of which I could be reasonably certain was that Sam would bring the fight to me. If Wally had set him down on the eastern end as scheduled, he would even now be working his way towards

me. He would feel confident, as well he might, that he could beat me in a knife fight and his aim would be to bring about a contact between us. He would come warily, expecting a possible ambush, but he would come.

I trotted straight up the center of the island for a hundred yards. I had at least two hours before Sam, slowly and cautiously as he must come, could reach my end of the island. In that two hours I must build and bait a trap.

My memory had not played me false. Only a short distance inland I found a wild scuppernong vine, the shoots newly green with the rebirth of spring. It was wrapped round and about a fallen pine tree of larger than average size. With my knife I cut and trimmed over a hundred feet of the supple vines and, working as swiftly as my fingers would fly, I plaited them together in threes. I soon had a rope about forty feet long, one not as limber as I would have preferred but serviceable and strong.

The trap must be set inland from the vines, since my work there was obvious. I walked eastward another hundred feet. Sam was sure to come down the center, only checking the edges to make sure I hadn't slipped past him. This close to the end, the island was less than a hundred yards wide and the strip of pines in its center not more than fifty, and thinly spaced at that.

The best tree for my purpose was the persimmon, since it is extremely limber, yet very strong. It had to be in brush thick enough to conceal it from a casual glance, yet fairly close to an open track. The one I selected was a young tree, not over fifteen feet tall. A natural path ran about thirty feet from it, almost in the center of the island, yet the tree itself was in thick brush, concealed on the side nearest the path by two scrubby pines.

I climbed the little tree, as high as it would bear my weight, and looped my belt about the narrow trunk a couple of feet from the top. Then, holding my belt, I swung off on the side nearest the path and the resilient trunk lowered me gently to the ground. With the free end of the belt I made a saddle-hitch to the nearest pine branch capable of holding the weight, and went after my improvised rope.

It took a little doing to tie the end of my rope around the sapling without breaking a vine, but I accomplished it. Then I shifted my belt, bringing the tree top lower and pulling it as far forward as my strength permitted.

When I felt that I had the maximum pressure the sapling would stand, I fastened the belt again and completed my trap.

Taking the free end of the vine rope, I strung it out to the natural path I had found and, making a loop about four feet wide in the end, spread it there.

The trigger stopped me. I debated for a moment the idea of making one, then gave it up and decided to work the trap by hand.

I needed to be close by, to finish subduing Sam in case he did not get snatched hard enough to knock him senseless. There was a possibility that the violent pull of the trap might snap his neck, but I doubted having such luck.

Holding the sapling firmly, I rearranged the belt to where a quick yank would free the pliant tree. After that I had to hide my work, and arrange the loop so that the edge away from the tree was six inches off the ground, out of fear that it might pull under his feet and miss him completely. The tree's bent shape was fairly well hidden behind the two pines.

The spot where I intended to lie in ambush was in thick brush, well concealed from the path. A little careful work in and around the path obliterated all traces of my having been there, and it took only a few leaves and pine needles, scattered with care on the ground where they abounded, to hide the loop itself. The trap was ready.

I glanced at the sun overhead. It was riding high, almost halfway to noon. My two hours were up. I settled myself in hiding. If my timetable was accurate, Sam would be along at any moment.

IV

I HEARD Sam while he was still a good way off. I heard him because he was whistling gayly.

He came noisily and happily through the brush, as careless and unheeding of waiting death as though he would welcome its cold embrace.

For the first time in my life I felt a small touch of admiration for Sam. His hatred was so deep that the prospect of killing me made him careless of his own life and safety. Such galling effrontery, such complete lack of respect for my ability to harm him, made me regret the decision I had made to spare his life, but for Jessica's sake, for what she thought she wanted, I would persevere.

I huddled closer to the ground, completely hidden, and waited.

Sam took his time. I realized, as he whistled his way through *Ol' Dan Tucker,* that he was coursing back and forth across the width of the island, moving enough from center on either side to insure that I did not slip past him. All he wanted, obviously, was a face-to-face encounter, from which only one of us would walk away.

After a moment more he emerged from the brush on the other side of a clear strip of sand, perhaps fifty feet wide, that ran completely across the island a hundred yards further inland. He stopped and stood half hidden in the shadows, staring across the open sand. The whistling ceased.

From where I crouched I could see him only dimly, but realized there was something abnormal about his shape. When he was certain I was not lying in ambush at the edge of the brush, Sam moved into the open and crossed the sandy area.

I saw him clearly for the first time, saw his tall, muscular form, the golden hair, the Apollo ease in his careless stride. I saw, also, what had made him seem odd, out of shape, in the shadows, and my breath caught in my throat. I felt strangled, suddenly weak; a hammering, strong and insistent, began behind my eyes, for I saw my death walking towards me.

Sam came on, silent and intent, darting quick and penetrating glances on all sides. Bare-chested, barefooted, he had the hunter's keen eye, the wariness of wild things. He was a walking reincarnation of primitive man, on the trail of an animal he must kill.

I was that animal, and there was little doubt Sam could kill me. Strapped across his back was a large quiver, filled with steel-tipped arrows. In his hand was a long bow, an arrow already on the string.

There was no time to think, to change my plan. He was across the open space and into the shadows in a few swift strides. Quaking, I crouched lower and watched him come. On this narrow end of the island there was no need to search both sides of the center. He came straight down the semi-open path towards my trap.

I plucked up my courage and waited. To expose myself meant swift death under sharp-edged arrows. And knowing Sam as I did, I had no doubt he had practiced with the bow until he was thoroughly proficient.

He was frowning now. There was only a very little more island to search.

Sam was looking about him more carefully than he was watching his footing. I felt my hopes stir and come alive. In the space of a few heartbeats he had covered the short hundred yards from the open space to the trap and was walking calmly towards it, his restless, shifting gaze probing the undergrowth on both sides and the tall trees overhead.

He walked to within five feet of the trap, glanced casually ahead, and saw it.

He stopped, and the frown left his face. Slowly he smiled, and then he chuckled quietly to himself. Here was his confirmation that I was on the island, and his victim

and prey. He took two steps and stopped just outside the circle, examining it with a critical eye. From there he lifted his gaze, and I held my breath as he stared directly at the point where I crouched by the limber end of the young tree.

In an involuntary action, lest they should gleam in the shadows, I closed my eyes. When I opened them again his gaze had shifted, and he was examining the undergrowth on the other side of the trail.

"This is an awfully poor trap, Jeremy," he said loudly, looking at the clump of bushes across the trail.

They were thicker than the ones I lay behind and would have made a better shelter. Also, they were about thirty-five feet from the trap. I was crouching not more than fifteen feet from where Sam stood.

"I'm ashamed of you, Jeremy—" he continued the one-sided conversation—"no self-respecting hunter would permit himself to be caught in a thing that obvious. Do you think I'm blind?"

As he spoke Sam stooped, picked up a large branch and stirred the crude rope circle. When nothing happened he hooked the end of the branch in the circle and gave it a vigorous tug.

I yanked on the belt. The loop closed with a rush, locking firmly round the branch. It was snatched out of Sam's grasp and flew through the air at the end of the vine rope. The supple tree straightened with terrible speed, went on past the plumb and bent far to the other side. As it returned to center again the branch went hurtling past, took up the slack in the rope, and broke it when it reached the end. The branch went flying on, landing, at least eighty feet away.

"That would have snatched me loose from my teeth, wouldn't it, Jeremy?" Sam said aloud, and chuckled again. Turning his back on me, he lifted the bow to a shooting stance. Crouching a little, he began stalking the brush on the other side of the trail.

He had not realized the trap had a live trigger. His misconception gave me a slim and puny chance to live. I waited, not daring to make a sound, until he reached the brush pile and went out of sight behind it.

I sprang to my feet and darted towards the sandy open space. Dodging, leaping, jumping, keeping behind whatever cover was available, I fled at my best speed. Behind me I heard hurried footsteps as Sam came back round the brush to the trail, then the heavy crashing of small branches as he started in pursuit.

It took me only seconds to reach the edge of the open ground. I realized, as I started across, that behind me all sounds of pursuit had ceased.

I turned my head for one quick, appraising glance. Sam was standing in the center of the trail a hundred feet behind me, unmoving and calm. The bow was raised, the

string drawn. He intended to stand where he was and get me as I crossed the open space.

I had no choice but to run that gantlet of death. I darted into the open, my mind working as busily as my feet. After two strides I threw myself to the left, landed on my hands in the sand, rolled over once, and scrambled to my feet again. My guess had been good. The arrow whistled through the air where I would have been on the third step. I had barely got up speed again, this time angling down the length of the sandy course, when another arrow almost touched me on my right side.

The cover of the brush was close now. I did a sharp left turn, angling back towards Sam slightly, and jumped straight for the woods, bending over as I entered their shade. His last arrow pierced my right hip, the force of the impact knocking me off my feet.

I was up and bounding away in seconds, the sting of the arrow hardly felt, though it still clung to the fleshy part of my right buttock. After a moment more the pain began to come. I reached back to remove the arrow, but it had penetrated deeply enough for the barbs to become imbedded. I would have to stop and cut it out.

I glanced behind me, at my own trail. The wound was not bleeding too badly and my trouser leg was soaking up all blood. Slowing down a little, I began to hide my passage. At the same time my brain started functioning again.

Oddly, it had not occurred to me till now that the contest was off. I no longer felt any obligation, moral or otherwise, to finish this uneven battle. Now my sole concern was to keep life in my body and get off the island. When that thought had penetrated, another swiftly followed. I was going the wrong way. From the eastern end it was a full two miles to land, farther than I could safely expect to swim. From the western end, where I had landed, it was only five hundred feet across the pass to the long narrow peninsula which connected with the mainland. Except when the swift tide was running it was an easy swim.

The obvious thing to do was hide in the undergrowth, let Sam pass by me, and then swim the pass to shore. There I could tell the whole story to the sheriff and have Sam brought before a judge for attempted murder. The fact that I was wounded, and fairly seriously, made it foolish for me to stay and attempt to fight.

My best course of action was so clear it would be equally apparent to Sam. Knowing he could not now let me escape, he would come east slowly, searching the brush thoroughly. For him, it was now a matter of killing me or losing all he had hoped to gain. He would take his time, be methodical and slow, and he would not miss me.

I ran for a quarter of a mile,

stopped, panting, and rested a precious moment. Looking about me, I spied a thick clump of brush and forced my way into it. Once in the center, I enlarged the hole the arrow had made in my trousers and explored the wound with my fingers. The arrow had penetrated from the side, and one point of the barb was securely under the surface of the skin.

I was badly handicapped by not being able to see what I was doing, but I took the bowie and made an incision just above the buried barb. I was keyed to such a pitch of excitement that the pain, which would normally have been almost unbearable, was only a minor torment. The blood gushed out of the new wound, wet and sticky, but the barb came free. Being as gentle on myself as I could, I worked the arrow loose, and at last held the bloody, deadly thing in my hand.

I was bleeding profusely now. With the bowie I cut off the trouser leg that was not yet blood-soaked and made a rough bandage, folding one piece into a pad and cutting straps to bind it in place. What I achieved was of doubtful value, but it would stop the bleeding.

I needed to sit down and rest, but I knew there would not be time. Sam must already have covered most of the territory between us. Even now he might be creeping towards my shelter. I stepped out of the brush, being careful not to tear the undergrowth, keeping my feet on the grass. A short distance away I stopped and looked back. The copious blood I had shed was well hidden.

I set off at an easy lope for the eastern end, carrying in my hand the arrow which had almost been my death. A slow and burning anger had begun to possess me. I was not sure now that, even if some way had been miraculously opened to me, I would have called off the duel and returned to the mainland.

My wound was hurting, with a strong persistent throbbing, and I was light-headed from hard exercise after a heavy loss of blood. I was in no shape to fight an antagonist like Sam, but neither did I want to run.

I would have a little time. It would not occur to Sam that I would run straight to the end of the island. Once he lost my trail Sam would check every large patch of brush, every available hiding place, in his progress eastward. There would be no slipping past him and I did not choose to try.

Somewhere deep in my soul I took an irrevocable step. This contest became not a fight between two men, over a girl, but a duel to the death between mortal enemies. I had begun this fight full of self-confidence, but now it looked as if it must end in my death. I had sorely underestimated Sam, and the blood left in the brush was the price I had paid.

I reached the eastern end in less

than half an hour without tiring myself. I stopped in the last thick patch of cover and set to work. My opponent's greatest advantage over me at the moment was the possession of a bow and arrow. I must have one also.

In the middle of the thicket was another persimmon tree. I hastily selected a branch and hacked it off with the heavy knife. I had no time in which to make a smooth, finished job. It would under no circumstances be as good a bow as Sam's, but it could be made into a lethal weapon.

I had picked a fairly thick branch, knowing I would not have time to test the weapon thoroughly. I cut off the bark and smoothed off the small limbs and twigs, then swiftly shaped it to a supple bow, leaving it very thick in the center. What I achieved was rough, but when I bent it in my hands it sprang back upon release with satisfying force.

I cut my leather belt into three strips. Two of these I tied together and with them strung the bow. I had one arrow, ready-made. It would not be enough, but at least I had a weapon if Sam should come upon me before I finished my preparations. I lifted the bow, selected a target about fifty feet away, and shot. The arrow went wide of the mark by ten feet. I had not allowed enough for the side-kicking motion given to the arrow by the thick center of the bow.

Retrieving the arrow, I tried again and came closer. I then changed my distance, moving up to within thirty feet, and got an idea of how much to allow in proportion to how far I was from the target. I returned to the first spot and shot again. I was surprised at how close I came.

With a target as large as Sam, I had a good chance of at least crippling him.

One arrow, though, was hardly enough ammunition. With the bowie I hacked some limbs from a nearby cedar and fashioned three more arrows, making them larger than was convenient, like the bow, but keeping their strength by their thickness.

Having no feathers, I had no choice but to do without. For points I went down to the shore and picked up several clam shells. By breaking them in two and chipping on the sides of each piece, I managed three very sharp arrow-shaped heads. I split one end of each arrow and wedged in a shell, tieing them in place with the remaining leather from my belt. Then I trimmed the shaft down to a narrow tail, leaving the shell-sharp end very heavy; I had a fairly presentable arrow.

With luck I would not need my three rough creations at all. The one arrow I possessed, sent truly, could end the fight. I doubted the accuracy of my aim with the crude bow and rough arrows, but hard

fate might compel me to live or die by their merits.

I had spent well over an hour in preparation. It was about time for Sam again.

V

HE WOULD not come walking noisily through the brush this time. I was forewarned and forearmed. There would be no gay whistling, no careless, godlike ease of bearing. He would come like a creature of the hunt stalking his prey, intent and alert, death hiding cloudily behind his pale eyes.

It was past midday now. If I should be lucky enough to evade him once more I might last until dark, and then it would be an easy matter to hide until the boat returned in the morning. He had to get me before darkness fell or his elaborate murder plan was ruined.

I saw Sam Hogarth coming.

He was following the same maneuver he had used before, walking down the center of the island and going far enough to each side to be certain I was not hidden in the brush. This time, he was keeping a wary eye in front as well. There was no chance of catching Sam in a hastily dug pit or logfall. He was alert, anxious to meet me and end it, but ever mindful of the safety of his own skin.

The faint glimmering of an idea came. From where I crouched in the brush, watching him, to the largest and thickest stand of bushes on this end of the island was a distance of only forty or fifty feet. I dug hastily in the sand and found a heavy shell in a few seconds. Sam was coming on steadily, methodical and careful, an arrow always on his string. The large patch of brush was to his left.

I waited until he had first examined all possible cover on his right and then recrossed from center and started on the large brushpile. Standing up, I hefted the shell, and watched Sam. There was suddenly in his stance, his bearing, a consciousness of being watched. Almost, he turned his head. I saw the involuntary quiver of his neck.

Then he decided he had found me, that I was crouching somewhere in the center of the pile befor him, and lifting his bow to the ready he went on round the brush and out of my sight.

I threw the shell. Arcing high and true, it came down with a small splintering of twigs, a distinct but not loud noise, in the middle of the brushpile. I crouched down again and waited.

Seconds later Sam emerged from the opposite side of the thicket at a run. Not seeing me fleeing away, he paused in indecision, then started his slow and intent circle again, this time keeping farther away from the edge of the thicket. He had no intention of letting me get close enough to him to do him damage.

I had achieved a good part of

what I wanted, what I felt I must have. Sam's attention was wholly and completely on the brush pile. I stepped out from behind my shelter, my own rude and undependable bow at the ready, and advanced on Sam. The die was cast, the cards dealt, and one of us must stand and the other fall by their decision.

I got quite close without his hearing me, something I could not have managed if he had not thought he had me placed. When I was within thirty feet I spoke:

"Turn around, Sam!"

He did more than turn. He leaped. Like a stricken deer on impact of the shot, like an arrow bolting from his own bow, he sprang ahead and to the side, turning even as he landed on his feet, the deadly bow rising. When he ceased to be a moving target I shot, just as his own arrow came winging towards me. He was not ready, was shooting from too quick an aim. His arrow whistled past my head as my own, aimed at his heart, missed from even that short range and gashed him across the ribs.

He reached for another arrow, then thought better of it and snatched out his knife, for I had thrown down my own clumsy weapon and ran toward him. Though Sam's size and strength gave him the advantage in a knife fight, I still had a better chance there than in trying to duel with my inaccurate bow. If he had completed his movements I could have leaped forward quickly and buried the bowie in his heart before he could shoot.

We paused, facing each other at not more than five paces.

He was breathing heavily, more from excitement and anticipation than effort. There was a wild, twisted look on his face. The naked hate that peered from his cloudy eyes made me tremble deep in my soul.

"This is the way it ought to be," he said slowly, his voice ragged and uneven. "You and me, Jeremy, and no one but the devil under us to tell the tale. A knife apiece, a man to man fight, and only one survivor. I didn't need the bow. I can kill you in a fair fight."

As he spoke the word "fair" his arm drew back in a gesture faster than the eye could follow, and while the "fight" was still lingering in the air his knife came winging towards me.

There are some truths so apparent they escape you until those who know you despair that you will ever learn them.

I had thought, since the depth of Sam's hate was first revealed, that he yearned for nothing more than an opportunity to sink a knife in me. I had taken it for granted that hate had made him strong. The cowardice he had displayed in youth, his dislike for combat with an equal had, I thought, been buried in the past. True, he had had very little trouble since his late

growth had made him such a formidable opponent, but we had all somehow got into the habit of thinking Sam a brave man.

He nearly succeeded. There was no time to dodge, to turn. The bright steel came flying, glinting slightly in the sunshine. There was nothing I could do, no time to move. I was holding my knife in my right hand, poised to cut. My left arm I instinctively jerked in front of me, muscles bunched, the arm upturned against my chest. The knife throw was good. The sharp point penetrated my elbow and jarred to a stop against the bone. I think it cracked it. This time there was pain, sudden and agonizing, but it was blessed pain, a pain that told me I might yet live.

I pulled Sam's knife free and tossed it over my shoulder. The blood gushed out in a red stream, but I paid it no heed. Holding the bowie in my right hand, heedless that my own life drained out of me onto the white sand, I walked towards Sam. My deepest fear was that he would turn and run and in my weakened condition I might not catch him, might forfeit the satisfaction of burying my knife in his treacherous heart.

Sam might well have run. I knew him now for a coward, and there was no point in making a fight of it, making a show of bravery when he was unarmed. What made him fight was the quality that had always lurked, cloudy and tenebrous, behind his eyes. For the first time since I had known Sam his eyes cleared, what rested there shining forth plain and clear.

Sam went mad.

He jumped back a few steps and stooped to pick up a dead limb. I had followed his movements and was close upon him when he reared up, the limb held high, no trace of sanity on his features. Gone now the air of godlike calm, the handsome cast of face, the self-consciously splendid figure of a man. What growled at me between loose lips was only a mad animal.

He leaped at me, swinging the large limb as though it were a child's toy. I dodged sideways and stabbed hard with the bowie, cutting him about the ribs but not injuring him seriously. Before I could jump back to safety the club was again in position, again coming for my head. This time I closed with him, stabbing and hacking in a rush of blood lust, not caring if the club caught me so long as I could bury the knife in his body.

I sank the bowie to the hilt in his chest, felt the good, solid impact of the blade cutting deep, and then the sun bloomed in a burst of fiery splendor, appallingly bright, and I knew nothing more.

IT WAS the self-same sun which awakened me. This time it was milder, less penetrating and abrupt. It came through a mist of clouds and was gentle and kind as

it warmed my face. It was red, also, for it had just risen.

I pushed Sam's body off my legs, where it had lain the night through, and took stock of myself. I was near dead from exposure and the quantities of blood lost from my two wounds, but both of them were dry enough now. My left arm was completely useless to me, and I did not possess enough strength to rise. There was little I could do but lie there, and the sandflies were already crawling over the body of Sam.

That was where Bill Holly and Wally Mathews found me half an hour later, when no one met them at the agreed rendezvous point and they came hunting the living and the dead.

I asked them to dig a deep hole about fifty feet from the beach. I did not attempt to help them, but they did a fair job and the body was well hidden.

When we had erased most of the traces of the combat, the three of us returned to the boat, Bill and Wally helping me when I faltered. They had brought food, knowing we fighters had none. Weak though I was, I ate my first meal in twenty-four hours. When we got into the boat, I asked Bill and Wally to row me to the center of the channel.

They looked at me strangely, but did as I requested.

We were in time. The Australian freighter which had docked in town the previous week was steaming slowly toward us, the black smoke trailing thick and noxious behind it. It was bound for Mobile.

I did not have to leave. Wally and Bill were the only persons, other than Jessica herself, who would know what had happened to Sam, and they were true and would not talk. I could disguise my wounds under a cloak of illness, stay in bed a few days, and resume my old life. And I could have Jessica. She had promised.

She had promised in the certainity that it would be Sam who returned. If I had beaten him it would, in her eyes, have been accomplished by deceit and fraud, and she would hate his conqueror with a passion that was boundless. Only the gaining of what she wanted would have revealed to her that Sam was no man. Now that he was dead he would be forever a hero.

I felt a strange, morbid desire to return to Bay City and do just what would be most unwise, marry the lovely Jessica and possess her in hate, live in the acid of unforgiveness the rest of our days. I no longer felt any love for her, but she was a beautiful and desirable woman and I could spite both of us by forcing her into a union which she would hate for the rest of her life. But I am not a Sam Hogarth. My hate was not that deep.

The ship stopped at our hail, and I clambered up the rope ladder as best I could with one useful arm. I did not look back.

The fat man watched me get to my feet. "Yeah, we killed him," he said. "It was sort of an accident." He grinned. "With you it could be different." I knew what he meant, all right.

Fifty Cents to Get Out

by RON GOULART

THE TALL blonde girl came running down across the wet lawn, her mouth open and her eyes wide. She hit the raw wood fence and jacknifed over on to the sidewalk.

She fell flung out, her black scarf unwinding and spinning away in the rain-thick wind. Water splashed and the grocery sack she'd been hugging split, sending three tomatoes, a grapefruit and a round cheese rolling. She was saying something, but the rain killed the sound.

Sam Brimmer was out of his second hand Mercedes and trotting toward her. He was a tall, heavy man wearing a black raincoat and no hat. He had a short-barreled .38 tucked, somewhat uncomfortably, in his waistband. The blonde was on her knees when he reached her and his tug at her left elbow got her upright.

The girl made an automatic motion, started to bend and retrieve the fallen groceries. She forgot about it and said, "He's dead in there."

"Who—Keaton?" said Sam.

The girl nodded. She was in her early twenties, her face thin but pretty. "He's all bloody. Right in the hallway. Beaten. And he's dead."

"You'd better come inside now. I'll look around, then call the police."

She ran her hands flat down the front of her muddy raincoat. "I don't want to go back inside. The groceries were for lunch and dinner. I closed my shop, took the day off to be with him. I bent over and touched him. He was cold but I didn't even set the paper bag down." She inhaled sharply, swayed toward Sam.

Sam circled her slender shoulders with his arm. "It'll be okay. You won't have to look any more. You can wait in the den."

The girl hesitated, shivering in the rain. "I suppose I have to."

Sam led her up the gravel path toward the low mission style house. The rain was slamming the red tile roof. "You didn't stay here last night."

"No, he sent me home. He was waiting for somebody." She stopped suddenly, jerked away. "Wait. I don't even know you. I was running away, afraid, and you helped me. But who are you?"

"Sam Brimmer," he said, reaching for her arm.

"That doesn't mean anything. How do you know Larry's name? And about me?"

Sam scratched his wet head. "I'm a private investigator. Lawrence Keaton's wife hired me. I found out about this place about a week ago. I've been watching it since. Keaton hasn't been home for the last few days. I've been making reports to his wife. She hasn't decided what to do yet.

"I was here last night until about midnight. When it looked like you weren't coming back I quit for the night. Got here this morning about nine-thirty, about an hour ago. It hasn't been very exciting work, but Mrs. Keaton pays me fifty dollars a day."

"You've been taking pictures of us and recording what we say."

"No," said Sam. "Not yet. This has been the preliminary work. I just sit out there and watch. Until Mrs. Keaton decides."

The girl said, "Well, you don't have a job any more."

Sam got hold of her and guided her up to the ront door. "Did he tell you who he was going to meet last night?"

"No." She turned her head and closed her eyes and Sam took her down the tiled hallway, skirting the dead man, and into a small room with only a black leatherette sofa in it. "How'd you know where the den was?"

"Saw the floor plan. I was checking up on that when Keaton rented his hideaway."

"You don't approve of his wanting a place where we could meet."

"Well," said Sam, "it's a lot less noisy than a motel."

The girl unbuttoned her raincoat. "I don't want to talk to you any more, Mr. Brimmer."

"Okay." He moved to the doorway.

"Do you know my name?"

"Linda Crossman," he told her. "You run a gift shop here in Marina City." He crossed the hallway and stood over Lawrence Keaton.

The accountant had been an average sized man. Someone had pistol-whipped him until he died. There were round burn marks on his hands and his left arm looked broken.

Sam went into the living room. What little furniture there was had been overturned. A dozen books and some half dozen recent magazines were sprawled near the

imitation fireplace. A travel poster showing Madrid had been ripped down from the wall.

Sam wandered around the room, listening to the rain hit heavily on the picture window. He specialized in divorce work. It was a nice safe kind of business. There weren't supposed to be any murders involved. Righting a chair, he sat down. The phone was tangled under the overturned sofa, the receiver off the hook and making a pocking sound.

Sam pulled the instrument to him, hung it up, then unpronged it again and dialled the Marina City police.

SAM'S BUTTOCKS touched the worn leather of his desk chair and the phone rang.

"Brimmer," he answered.

"Did the girl do it?" asked a slightly harsh woman's voice.

"Mrs. Keaton," said Sam, "I just left Marina City. I was going to call you."

"The police—that is, the Marina City bunch—are coming over now," said Lawrence Keaton's widow. "I already had some local police here."

"Why?"

"As you know, Brimmer, I was down at Laguna the past couple of days. I got back early this morning. Some one had ransacked our home. Desks, books, everything scattered to hell and gone. They even took those reports you've been sending me, the ones about Lawrence's carrying on and about the damned odd things he's done since he walked out on Lanz Accounting."

From his desk Sam could see out the window and across the street. The girlie magazine store had fifty-five nudist magazines hanging in its window and a seventy-year-old man in a green overcoat was huddled outside the display, his head ticking off the covers. The rain was still hard. "Did they take your jewels, furs, stuff like that?" Mrs. Keaton had money of her own, hadn't depended on her husband's accounting partnership salary.

"No, nothing like that. They tied up Weaver."

"Who, the butler?"

"Weaver's the gardener. Ames is the butler. He had yesterday off. So did Tucker."

"She's the maid," Sam supplied. "Look, Mrs. Keaton, I'm sorry about your husband."

The woman drew her breath in sharply. "Lawrence and I were no loving couple. What bugged me, Brimmer, was all the trouble he went through to be with that girl. Lawence was eight and a half years older than me. A dangerous age for a man."

"Well, I am sorry. I'll make my final report."

"Don't quit yet, Brimmer. Why not go ahead and find out who killed Lawrence?"

"That's the business of the Marine City police."

"I'll keep paying you," said Mrs. Keaton. "It's only a gesture. To make me look good with his damn relatives."

Sam patted his stomach. He was four and a half pounds overweight. "All right, Mrs. Keaton. I'll dig around some. I don't know if it'll be worth fifty dollars a day to you."

"It will," said the widow. "Oh, here come some more cops. Call me tomorrow."

Sam thought about driving over to Fairfax Avenue and having cheese blintzes. But he couldn't do that, not with his weight climbing. He decided to find his RAF exercise book.

The door of his office swung in and a fat man in a skyblue white fringed suit stepped in. He swept off his pearl grey stetson, shook raindrops from it, and said, "Mr. Brimmer, sir?"

"Yeah, I'm Sam Brimmer."

A bigger man, this one in a tight tweed suit, stepped around the cowboy. He had two .45 automatics, both pointed at Sam.

"I'm Meade Loft. And he's Vincent Gamage," he said.

"You always walk around with those ridiculous guns?"

"I'll keep you covered while Vincent searches the premises," said Loft. He had a large upturned nose that showed his almond-shaped nostrils.

Vincent put his cowboy hat back on. "Sir, if you'd sit back there on the window ledge I'll go through your desk."

"Say," said Sam, "what exactly are you guys up to?"

"We have reason to believe," said Loft, sitting down in the client chair and tipping the gun barrels up at Sam, "that you know of the whereabouts of a truckload of papers."

"You expect to find the truck here?"

"That would be foolish, sir," said Vincent as he slid out all the desk drawers and stacked them on the blotter. "Although it was only a Volkswagen bus type truck. Nothing very large."

"We've read your reports to Mrs. Keaton, you know," Loft said. His left eye gave a slow squint. "We know you happened to be tailing Keaton the day he quit Lanz and made off with all those private files."

The whole business had puzzled Sam. He hadn't been quite sure what Lawrence Keaton was up to. Sam had been hired to find out whether or not Keaton was seeing another woman. When he'd observed the accountant load a Volkswagen bus with office files and drive them away he'd mentioned it casually in his report to Mrs. Keaton.

Vincent was checking out the drawers. "We have to acquire those records, sir."

"You didn't find them at Mrs. Keaton's place in Bel Air, huh?" Sam asked.

"No," said Loft. "Which is why we came here. You know where Keaton took those papers. You may have gone thera and taken them."

"Do these work at all?" asked Vincent as he held up Sam's RAF exercise book.

"If you keep at it every day."

"I did all those Charles Atlas exercises when I was in my teens," said Loft. "It's much the same thing."

"We figure," said Vincent, "that if you don't have those records here you can tell us where they are. We haven't tried Keaton's lady friend yet either."

"Your report was too vague," said Loft. He tucked one of the .45s away in a shoulder holster and fished out a few sheets of folded paper. Resting the other gun in his lap, he leafed through the report. "Yes, here it is. 'Your husband then drove to a deserted building in downtown Marina City and stored the files there'." That's how you phrase it in your account. Too vague. What building exactly?"

"It didn't seem important enough to mention."

Loft picked up his gun. "You'll tell us now."

"No," said Sam.

"You hear about Keaton?" asked Vincent. He turned a drawer upside down.

"Yeah," Sam Brimmer said.

"We asked him about the files, too. Though we didn't intend to hurt him so finally."

"I figured," said Sam.

"No use being reluctant," said Loft.

"Sorry," said Sam.

Slowly Vincent went through the contents of Sam's desk and of his one wooden filing cabinet. He said finally, "The material still must be where Keaton left it. Will you guide us there, sir?"

"No," said Sam. "I'm not in sympathy with you guys."

"You'll get injured if you don't," Loft told him.

"Can't help that."

"Right," said Loft.

Vincent swung out with the side of his hand, chopping at Sam's neck. "We'll have to use the cottage," said the cowboy. Sam fell, passed out.

THE COTTAGE hung on the edge of a palisade above the choppy ocean. Loft was kneeling in front

of the shallow fireplace and jamming kindling under a composition log. Vincent had made himself a cup of cocoa in the shadowy kitchen and he was sitting on a canvas chair with one of Loft's guns inclined toward Sam.

Sam, on a rattan love seat, asked, "All your suits have fringe on them?"

"I have a great admiration for the old West, sir," said Vincent, sipping. "And so I dress accordingly."

Rain was working through the roof and dripping on the straw rug. Stepping around three wet spots, Loft came close to Sam. "A fire makes it snug. Now you tell us where you saw Keaton put the files."

"Your fire went out."

Loft back-handed Sam in the face. "The whereabouts of the old building you mentioned in your report."

Carefully Vincent positioned his cocoa cup on the floor beside his chair. He removed his damp stetson and dropped it next to the cup. Arching up, he slammed the barrel of the automatic across Sam's cheek. "Quit skylarking around, sir."

After a moment Sam could hear the wind worrying the stained glass windows again. "I'm not going to confide in you guys."

The cottage made a low ratcheting sound, groaned.

Loft stepped away from Sam, looked toward the window. A cypress tree went by.

"Damn," said Loft. "Part of the hillside's dropping away."

"I told you it goes on all the time in this neighborhood," Vincent said.

The cottage shook and creaked.

Sam waited until Vincent turned his head to look toward the door. He shot up sideways and hit the cowboy in the stomach, collaring his gun hand with his left hand. The house swayed and rocked. Vincent doubled over and Sam kicked him.

Loft was yanking out the other automatic as Sam hit the door. He tumbled out into the hard rain, caught his balance and cut into the brush. The whole hillside, all of its half dozen small houses, was rolling and buckling. Sam kept low, working up toward the street, two hundred feet away.

He heard Loft shouting behind him.

He slipped once, went down to his knees. He pushed up out of the mud and zigzagged higher. The cottage he'd been in made ripping noises and inside it Vincent yelled for help. Loft ran back to him.

Sam made the street and stopped against a solid telephone pole. People from the other houses were climbing up from below. If Vincent and Loft got out of this, they'd try for the Crossman girl next, to find out what she knew. Sam had to get to her first. He started running up

the street, away from the tumbling houses.

He located Linda Crossman in the small apartment she had above the gift shop she operated.

"Now what?" she said, keeping him in the cream colored hall.

"A couple of guys may be heading this way," said Sam. "They'll want to talk to you about those files Keaton took from the Lanz outfit."

"Files?" she said. "How come you're so muddy?"

Sam took her hand off the half open apartment door, eased her inside. "I'm the victim of erosion. Now, we don't have time. I don't want to run into those guys again yet. Put on a raincoat."

"What two men?"

"The two who accidently killed Keaton."

The blonde girl touched her left cheek with her hand. "Oh. Where are we going?"

"To the place Keaton hid the stuff."

She moved to a closet next to a madras covered low sofa. "I still don't know what you're—"

"Yes, you do. We'll talk about it while we're retreating. Let's go."

Putting on a tan car coat the girl said, "Would they try to kill me?"

"They'd try to make you talk. They didn't mean to kill Keaton." Sam opened the apartment door, checked the hallway. "Does that green door lead to the back of this place?"

"To the garbage area, yes."

"Good," said Sam, hurrying her along. Just in case, he had his gun out.

Sam parked his retrieved Mercedes in the alley.

"Over there," he said, nodding at the back of a defunct neighborhood theater. "Keaton managed a few buildings and pieces of property on the side. Including the Rialto."

"I know." Linda swung out of the car.

"I happened to be watching him, for other reasons, the day he decided to swipe all this from his boss. Know why?"

They went up brick steps to the movie house's back door. The rain was thin and cold.

"Yes," the girl said.

Sam tried four keys on his ring, got the wooden door open. They were in a dark corridor. Sam had brought his flashlight from the glove compartment and he flicked it on. Tucked in his waistband was his spare .38, to replace the one Vincent and Loft lifted.

At the end of the corridor was an exit marked—*door*. Through that they found the lobby of the theater. "It still smells like popcorn," said Sam. "About what Keaton was up to?"

Linda said, "I guess I should tell you. I don't want to be killed over it." She followed Sam as he went through an archway labeled Aisle 3. "He had a falling out with Mr.

Lanz. Over money. Over the raise he wanted."

On the small stage of the movie house, in front of the faded screen, stood two metal filing cabinets. "He stored them up there."

"See," said Linda, "you don't know about Mr. Lanz." She watched Sam cross the orchestra pit and swing up on the stage. "He works as a consultant for a lot of the big firms in Marina City. And several of the industrial plants down in Arguello. In other words, companies all over Verde County."

"And?" asked Sam. He fished a thick file folder from the top drawer of the nearest cabinet.

"Well, because of his work Lanz became friendly, quite friendly, with Curtis Jobbins."

"The county assessor?" Sam was looking at a packet of canceled checks.

"Right. As Larry explained it to me, Lanz paid certain amounts to Jobbins and in return got lower tax assessments for his clients. He's been at it for several years."

"So some of this indicates," Sam said. He popped the folder away, closed the drawer and leaned an elbow on the top of the cabinet. Rain was hitting straight down on the skylight behind the screen. "Was Larry Keaton planning to blackmail his boss? Or blackmail Jobbins?"

Linda shook her head, drifted back and sat in a movie seat in the first row. "Did you ever have to sit this close to the screen? It made Robert Wagner tall and thin. No Larry just got mad at Lanz. Maybe he did consider trying blackmail, but he wasn't up to that. It was an angry sort of impulse that got him to take all the confidential files."

"What was he going to do? And who was he going to see last night?"

"I didn't want to tell the police about it, she said. "I knew Lanz wouldn't talk about the missing files to the police. I didn't want Larry to be thought a thief."

"Okay, but who was he supposed to see?"

"He'd decided," said the blonde, "to give the story to the papers."

Sam dropped over the edge of the stage. Three music stands were still ringed in front of it. One tipped as he brushed it and sheet music fluttered to the floor. "What? The *LA Times?*"

"No. He didn't approve of the *Times*. He admired a columnist on our local paper. *The Marina Advocate*. He called him yesterday. I think that's who he was going to talk to, turn over all this material to."

"Who was the reporter?"

"A man named Jack Weller, what they used to call a muckraker. You know the type."

"Why didn't Keaton just go to the district attorney?"

"He wanted to make sure everything came out in the open."

"As I recall, the DA down here is a fairly honest guy." Sam took

the seat next to the girl. "Okay, I'll get you a room some place. Some secluded motel down the coast for awhile. Then I'll go talk to Weller." He ran his hand along the arm rest of the chair and hit a wad of dry chewing gum. "Remember bank night?" he asked.

"No," said the girl. "I'm only twenty-two."

JACK WELLER was thin and faded, about forty. He had pale hair and a notched face. He was sitting behind a checkered table in a saloon near the newspaper office. He was smoking cigarette-sized cigars and drinking dark beer.

Sam took the empty chair across from him. "They sent me over from the *Advocate* office."

"Good, I was looking for somebody to play darts with. Who the hell are you?"

"Sam Brimmer. I'm a private investigator."

Weller's head jerked up and down. "They write you up in the *Tiimes* now and then. You got a press agent?"

"What I'd like to know," said said, his elbows on the table, "is whether you saw Lawrence Keaton last night."

The bartender, dressed as a Cockney, brought Weller a new glass of beer.

"Who?" asked Weller.

"Keaton. He called you."

"No."

"There's an old joke," said Sam. "About some guys who put a sign up on a shack. Free concert inside. So a fellow goes in and sits down. And then these guys play some godawful ear splitting music. The fellow gets up to leave. But now the door's locked. A big guy says that'll be fifty cents. But the concert was free. Free to come in, says the tough guy. But fifty cents to get out. That's the way I'm starting to feel.

"I got into this because of a simple possible divorce case. Now people are getting killed. I've been slugged, konked with a forty-five and I almost slid into the Pacific Ocean. Damn it, Weller, tell me about Keaton or I'll drag you out of here and knock you silly."

Weller cupped his hands around the beer glass. "Well," he said, "Keaton told me he had certain evidence. He told me this over the phone and said he wanted to expose Lanz and the county assessor. You know what he had taken?"

"Yeah."

Weller raised the glass halfway to his mouth, then lowered it. "Well, Keaton and I were not too close. He didn't realize that Assessor Jobbins and I are close friends. I won't go into the whys of that."

"Money."

"Well, anyway, I told Jobbins what Keaton had told me, explained that Keaton wanted me to drop by that house he was renting and talk about what he had. I told Jobbins all that and didn't keep my appointment."

"And Keaton got killed."

"I don't think that was intended."

"Jobbins has a place up in the hills above here. What's the address?"

Weller told him. "You're going to call on Jobbins?"

"Yeah, and don't alert him." Sam stood up.

Just inside the doorway was a phone booth. He stepped in and made a call.

The Jobbins place was on a hill above Marina City, a three-story Victorian, cross-patched with black gingerbread. Its roof was spiked with spires and weathercocks. After Sam rang the bell the gargoyled front door buzzed like an apartment house door. He caught it and pushed inside.

He'd stepped into a small parlor, thick with drapes and with twined roses on the carpet. Birds were perched under bell glasses and sprays of pussy willows stood stiff in urns. There were three claw foot tables in the room and a roll top desk. Somewhere off upstairs a piano was playing. A waltz.

Sam watched the curtained archway across the room. It appeared to be breathing. "Mr. Jobbins at home?"

Thick fingers parted the curtains and a short strong-jawed man with closecut white hair came in.

"The butler has the flu and it's the hour for the maid's piano lesson," said the man. "My wife is in Encinada as usual."

"I'm Sam Brimmer. I'd like to talk to you."

Jobbins dropped his big hands into the pockets of his navy blazer. "Step with me into the library, Mr. Brimmer."

Through the dark curtains and to the left was a beam-ceilinged room walled with shelves. There were no books. Small stuffed animals filled all the space.

"You're not much of a reader," said Sam.

"When I was a boy I answered one of those taxidermy ads in a pulp magazine," said Jobbins. He sat down in a real leather chair, not taking his hands from his pockets. "What was it you were interested in talking about?"

"The files Keaton borrowed from Lanz." Sam rested his shoulders against a row of foxes.

"The crime rate is up all across the nation," said Jobbins. "Even so-called trusted employees like

this man Keaton will stoop to thievery."

"I've seen what's in the files," said Sam.

"Oh," said Jobbins.

"I've talked to Jack Weller. I came out to suggest that we drop in on the district attorney, talk about what's been happening. Your hiring of Vincent Gamage and Loft."

"I have to admit they got out of hand," said Jobbins. He got up jerkily. "How much do you want?"

"Nothing," said Sam.

"I'd prefer to have no more strong-arming. You turn over the files and promise to be quiet. I'll pay you."

"I've already told the DA where to get the stuff," Sam said. "Before I came over here. But since I got pulled into this I wanted to see it all the way through."

"I know the ethics of your profession, Mr. Brimmer. Getting divorce evidence, bugging motel rooms, peeping over transoms. You're bluffing me in hopes of my goosing the amount I'll give you."

Sam shook his head. "No."

"You'd better cooperate, sir," said Vincent Gamage, coming into the library. He had on a white leather suit now.

"Vincent," said Jobbins, "you were to stay in the music room."

"I'm a restless sort," Vincent said. "Let Meade and I talk to him about the files again."

"No," said the assessor. "We'll do this the sensible way. With a simple bribe. How much?"

The phone was sitting on a shelf next to a squirrel. It rang. Taking one thick hand from his coat, Jobbins answered it. He talked for several minutes with his back to Sam and the cowboy gunman. Then he turned, hanging up.

"That was," Jobbins said, "the district attorney, Gordon Levy. It seems Brimmer really did tell them where to find everything Keaton took. He's coming over now to talk to me."

"The police should be getting here pretty soon, too," said Sam Brimmer.

"We'll stand them off," offered Vincent.

"I'm afraid not," said Jobbins, both hands hidden away again. "We'll simply wait."

"Not Meade and me, sir," said Vincent.

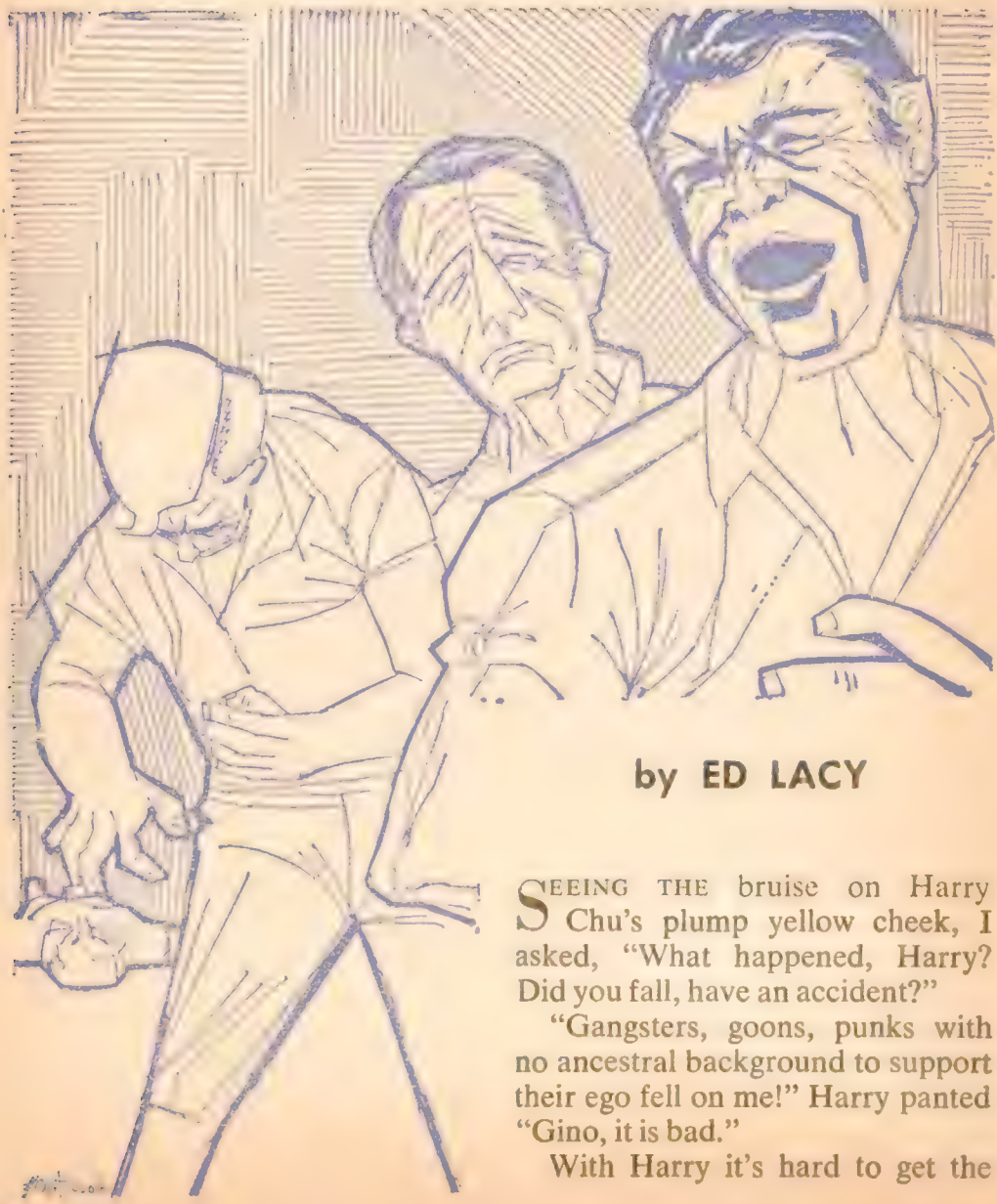
Sam spun slowly and hit Vincent over the ear. As the man shuffled to keep his balance, Sam kneed him, then brought both fists down on his neck as he fell. Vincent spread out on the hardwood floor.

Jobbins sighed. "I thought you'd take money."

"I may be a divorce detective," said Sam Brimmer. "But I'm not a crook." There was still work to be done. He stepped over the fallen cowboy and went looking for the other gunman.

Ancestral Muscle

He was unarmed, alone, against two vicious killers. It was time to call on his honorable ancestors for a little help . . .



by ED LACY

SEEING THE bruise on Harry Chu's plump yellow cheek, I asked, "What happened, Harry? Did you fall, have an accident?"

"Gangsters, goons, punks with no ancestral background to support their ego fell on me!" Harry panted "Gino, it is bad."

With Harry it's hard to get the

drift of what he's talking about, at first. Not that he's stupid. The fact is old Harry is about the most educated man I know. He's always reading his Chinese books and is full of these Oriental ideas. Or maybe they're just Harry Chu ideas, which may sound far-out on first hearing but always add up to a lot of common sense.

When I was coming up, Harry opened his Chinese laundry in the basement of this house next to my dad's fruit store. When Harry wasn't doing laundry he was turning one of those old-fashioned ice cream freezers. Harry is real queer for ice cream, an artist at making it.

Later, Harry shut the laundry, although he still lives in the basement next to our store—I run the fruit shop now—and started pushing an ice cream cart. As he told me, "This much better work, Gino. I enjoy being out in the open. The laundry is damp, bad for the bones."

Over the years Harry and his golden ice cream cart have become a neighborhood fixture. Although Harry sells the regular make ice cream pops, he often make his own and they are just out of this world in taste. He has a Mandarin pop made of big chunks of litchi nuts and coconuts, spices, mixed into coffee ice cream with a bitter chocolate covering. When I suggested he take this, or his glazed orange-strawberry pops, to one of the big companies, Harry shrugged.

"No, Gino," he said. "Such pops should only be made by hand and in small quantities, with good sized chunks of fruits and nuts. Why should I battle a great company over quality and money? I make enough for my needs and it is a work of love for me."

Harry always had a gang of kids and teenagers around him because at the end of the day, or whenever Harry wanted to knock off he would hand out his remaining pops for free.

As he told me, "They are already a little soft and might spoil by morning, even though I could refreeze them. This is good advertising. The kids hang around all afternoon waiting for a free pop and in the meantime they buy a few. Plus, I like kids."

Harry is always reading. One day I had a new sidewalk put down and some jerks had to carve their initials in the cement before it hardened. While I was cursing, Harry said sadly, "The trouble with kids in America today; they have no knowledge of their historical background, although it is only a mere few hundred years old. Now, we have no need to bolster our ego in this silly fashion. You have read of the might of the Roman Empire, while in China we had a civilization when Romans still lived in caves."

"I don't know about that stuff. I think of myself as an American."

"Of course, so do I. But I can not and do not want to forget my Chi-

nese background. Now, whoever ruined your sidewalk, if they had known something of their own short history, for example, the way Washington's ragged army stood up to the British redcoats, or Perry's naval victory on Lake Erie, would they have the need of showing off their initials in your sidewalk? But kids today, they don't know nor care. It is a pity."

"They learn all that history stuff in school, don't they?"

Harry had sighed. "It goes in one ear and out the other; they do not relate it to themselves. Listen, Gino, one day years ago, I am walking downtown. Suddenly everybody is flattened against the walls, in a panic—the police and some robbers are having a gun battle. I also flatten myself against a wall but I am not afraid for I know we Chinese invented gunpowder, so why should I panic? In other words, my historical background gave me peace and strength." He looked very pale, I saw.

I had the old man sit in a chair by the cash register and I sponged his face with a towel and ice water. I could see he was real shaken. I asked, "What's all this about gangsters, Harry?"

"A few minutes ago two young men stop at my cart and ask for pops. It happens today I made some ginger pops full of black walnuts—I tell you it costs me more than the fifteen cents I sell them for, to make them. Well, I sold them two and they ate them with enjoyment. One of them, a sharp-faced fellow with cold black eyes—those are always the violent ones—he says, 'Old man, we been watching you. You got a nice business going. The bit about giving pops to kids for free is a real good idea. Maybe we become your partners.'

" 'Thank you, but I have no need for partners. I make enough for my needs.'

" 'Sure, for that dump of a basement you live in. Old man, with us as partners you'll still work as little as you do now, but you'll be living in a fine apartment, ride in a big car. You'll make plenty of loot. Like three hundred dollars a week.'

" 'Three hundred dollars per week from just selling ice cream?' I asked.

"The bigger man, the one with a nervous twitch in his hard eyes, he just laughed and said, 'It won't be exactly the same ice cream,' we're going to add something to the pops you give away. Kids eat one of these special pops and after awhile they won't want no other pops except yours. Then we orbit the price. You see?'

"Gino, you know what they have in mind?"

"They'll put dope in the pops?"

Harry nodded. "Sure, narcotics of some kind, use me and my ice cream to get innocent kids on the habit. I tell them, 'I am not interested in partners or your dirty scheme.'

"They drag me into an alley and the big man, he knocked me down. It was already dark and nobody around the street. The smaller one placed a knife at my throat and said, 'Old man, there's also fringe benefits to your new partnership, like living! You think about all the money you're going to make, or how slow you're going to die. We talk to you again tomorrow. No tricks, Chink. We know where to find you.' Harry shook his bald head.

"The dirty sons! Harry, what did the police say?"

"I have not gone to the police, Gino. What can the police do—guard me forever? In a week, a month, a year, these punks will return. I am not a man to live under fear. Also if word of this gets around, if there is a police officer near my cart, people would be afraid to ever buy my pops. No, I must handle this myself."

"But how? Harry, these are killers!"

"I don't know how, but I shall ask my ancesters for wisdom."

"Come on, Harry, this isn't time for big words or—"

"Gino, it is my problem and I will handle it. Now I go to rest and later I will arise to think."

Over supper I asked my wife what we should do. She said, "Gino, stay out of it or we'll have these goons down on us. After all, the old man said he would handle things."

"But he's dealing with killers!"

"Gino, don't get involved," the wife said nervously.

I thought of making an anonymous call to the police but that might make things worse for Harry. unless I told him first. The old boy might end up in the can himself. So I did nothing, but worry all night and today.

About four Harry came into the store, looking his usual cheerful self, a neat bit of tape over the bruise. He asked, "Gino, can I have a cup of hot water?"

"Tea on a day this warm?" I asked. "What—"

"Hot water from the sink will do," the old man said calmly.

I gave him a glass tumbler and he took out what looked like white nuts, about the size of half a peanut, tossed two of them into the hot water.

"Harry, what about the goons?" I said.

"We met an hour ago. They bought two of my pops and we talked. I agreed that they will be my partners. We are to meet tomorrow to arrange the details."

I was shocked. "My God, Harry, how could you agree to such a dirty thing? Why didn't you go to the police?"

Harry stared at the wall clock above my apples. "By now they are in great pain and will soon die. Even if they should see a doctor he will not be able to help them, for he has no knowledge of what is wrong. In the ancient days a favorite Chinese form of assassination was to invite the victim to a meal; in the food sharpened bits of bamboo rolled into a tiny ball and held by vegetable matter, were added.

"On reaching the stomach, in time the vegetable matter is eaten away by the stomach acids. The bamboo uncoils like a released spring, sticking the intestines and vital organs, causing bleeding and a most painful if fast death. I gave them a dozen of these in a caramel pop loaded with chunks of pineapple and almonds."

"What? Harry, you mean you killed them?"

"In a way it might be said I had a part in their death. But then special pops were their idea. Nor did I force them to buy the fatal pops. Gino, it is as I've always told you, a man with a knowledge of his background is a strong man."

"But, Harry are you positive this will work? If not—" I followed Harry's pointing finger. The coiled bits of bamboo suddenly straightened out with great force, striking the side of the tumbler like tiny swords.

READ—This Great Mystery Novel in the November Issue of:

SHELL SCOTT MYSTERY MAGAZINE

THE CAUTIOUS KILLERS

A Brand New SHELL SCOTT Complete Novel

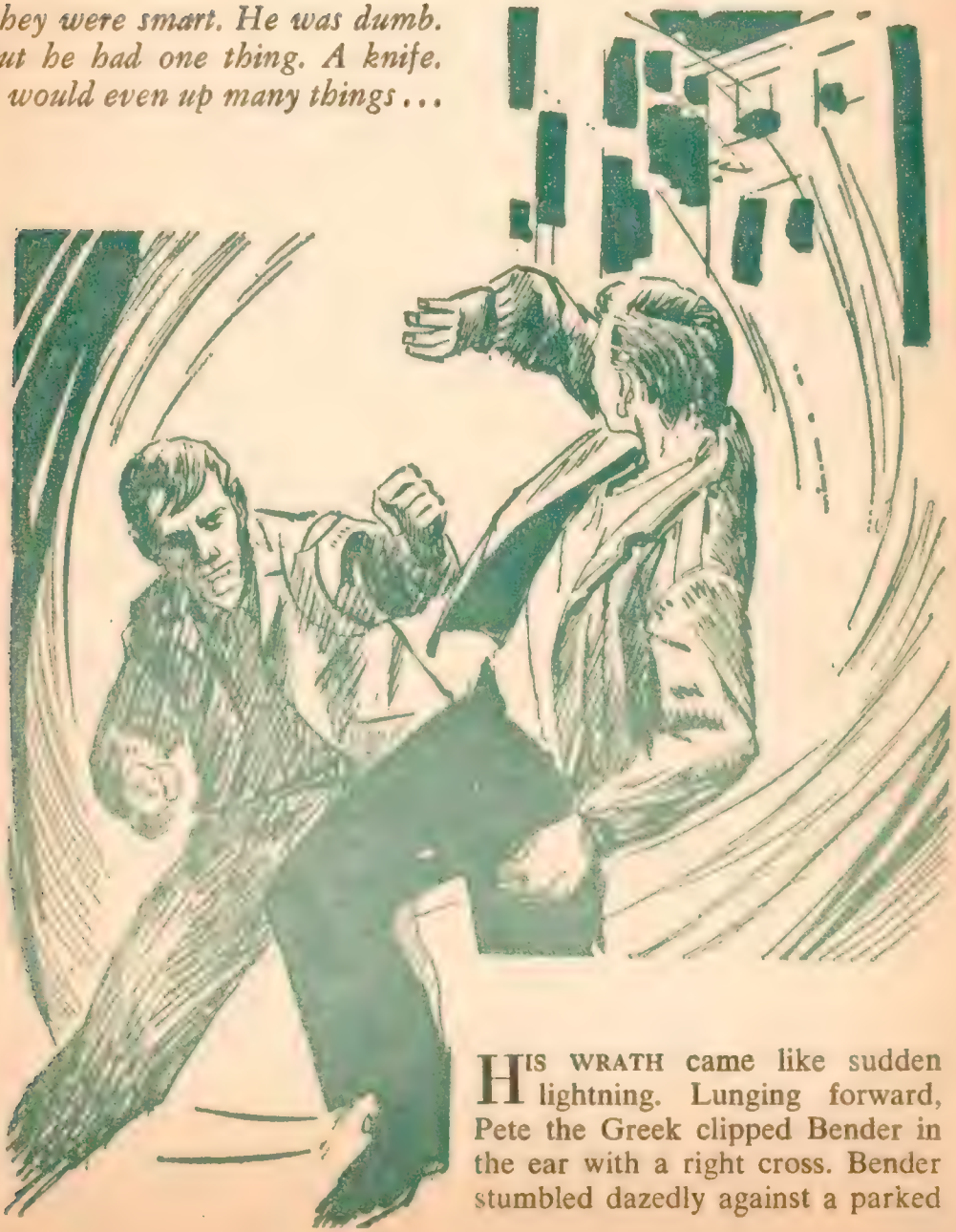
by RICHARD S. PRATHER

When forty millions readers are in the mood for the ultimate in crime-reading thrills, they look for a Shell Scott novel. Yes, Richard Prather's racy private eye, and SHELL SCOTT MYSTERY MAGAZINE *have conquered the detective field! Get this next big issue! It's on sale right now, where you bought Mike Shayne!*

Pete the Greek

by ROBERT S. FISH

They were smart. He was dumb.
But he had one thing. A knife.
It would even up many things . . .



HIS WRATH came like sudden lightning. Lunging forward, Pete the Greek clipped Bender in the ear with a right cross. Bender stumbled dazedly against a parked

car. Pete moved in, careless for just one split second, and Bender kicked him in the groin.

Searing white pain stabbed up into Pete's stomach. His legs started to buckle. Automatically he reached for his hip pocket. When his knees touched the sidewalk, he had the long shiny blade pointed straight toward Bender's fat stomach.

A flat voice chopped in.

"Cut it, Pete. No blades." Whitey's command made Pete blink. Lanced with pain and nauseated, he drew an agonized breath. He struggled to his feet and folded the switchblade.

He saw Bender exhaling with relief. Sucker. Pete brought his fist up an arc from his waist. He felt the impact up to his shoulder and smiled as Bender turned and slid down the side of the car to the pavement, out this time, out for real.

"Okay, Pete. That's enough."

Whitey again. Seeing through a scarlet blur, Pete whirled to face him, squinting to bring him into focus

"Shut up, Whitey. You been givin' too damn many orders lately." Panting, he looked out into the ring of gang members.

"Where's my glasses?" he demanded. A girl handed them to him and he pushed his way out of the small crowd.

"Pete," Whitey yelled. Too angry to speak, Pete kept on.

Half a block from the gang, he sank down on the front steps of his apartment house. *Calm down, man, calm down,* he thought, as he took his glasses off. *You almost killed Bender.* Breathing hard, he brushed the hair away from his forehead.

"Yeah," he snarled. "Next time I'll knife the creep."

Calmed enough to be able to breathe through his nose, he two-fingered a crumpled cigarette out of his shirt.

And Whitey, there's another one, he thought scowling. Just because Whitey's leader of the Falcons, doesn't mean he owns everybody. Acts like a damn general. Pete cracked his knuckles, letting the cigarette dangle between his lips.

"How you feelin', champ?" Surprised, Pete looked up. Linda was leaning on the iron railing. His girl, and to him, very pretty.

Smiling, he nodded. Linda frowned.

"You know, Whitey's worried about you, Pete." Pete looked at her.

"Yeah, and he knows what he can do, too." He glanced down to the knot of boys and girls goofing in the street. Linda sighed. "We're afraid you'll hurt your head again, fighting so often like this."

Pete tensed, trying to hold his anger in.

"I wish just once everybody would get off my back for a while."

Linda straightened.

"Don't get so touchy," she said. "We're trying to help."

Pete jumped up, teeth bared.

"Bull! You ain't kiddin' me. You all think I should be in a nuthouse. You think I'm gonna go crazy any minute." Breathing hard, he paused. "Just 'cause I cracked my head and forgot how to read, doesn't mean I'm buggy." Angrily, he kicked at the stoop. Linda examined her nails.

"You gotta admit, you've been moody and angry most of the time, and fighting everybody." Exasperated, Pete looked at the sky and slapped his sides with his arms.

"It's because they all make fun of me, and call me Shakespeare. What do you want me to do, smile and think it's a joke?"

"Why don't you learn to read again?" Linda asked. Shocked, he glared at her.

"Go away, will ya? Just beat it," he muttered. Linda stared at him for a few seconds. Her full lips pouted and then tightened.

"Suit yourself." She turned back to the Falcons. Pete watched her swivel-hipped walk, sexy and appealing. Despite himself he grinned thinly. He sure was lucky to have such a good-looker; she was about the only person he could trust.

Snorting, he sat down on the steps again and studied his cigarette. So Whitey was worried, he thought, frowning. So was everybody else, it seemed. All because of a lousy break. Sadly, Pete looked up at the clouds moving across the hot summer sky above the row of tenements. Three years ago. Sixteen years old.

He remembered the fight in the alley, and breaking his hand on the kid's head. But the kid had stayed up and come back and flipped him or something. He couldn't remember that, but he knew he had gone flying into the brick wall, head first.

Then the hospital, and the long days of hot headaches. And then he had been all right, except for one little detail. He had forgotten how to read. Out of habit, Pete rubbed the top of his head, searching for something.

And here I am. He pursed his lips. Three years and eleven jobs later, a nothing. My mother always screaming about money. If I could find work where I never had to read anything, I'd be okay. But they find out sooner or later—and good-by job. He leaned back on his elbows and rested his head against the iron railing.

Boy, if it wasn't for Linda, I don't think I could stand it. What I'll do is, I'll quit this crummy gang of Whitey's someday and take Linda upstate and I'll work on a farm or something. No reading there. He nodded at the thought.

Across the street, a man in his twenties walked out of an apartment building, stood on the steps for a few moments, and then went into the bar next door.

That guy kills me, Pete thought. When everybody else is in school or working, this guy goes to the bar. Where does he get his money? Rackets? Pete felt himself drawn to the man. Maybe he couldn't find a job either. Lived on this block for months now. No job, but nice clothes and women.

Tired of wondering about the stranger, Pete stood up. *Aw, hell with him.* He patted his knife in his hip pocket and sauntered down the block to join the Falcons. Linda would be waiting.

But Linda had vanished, and when he went home his mother went at it again.

Angry, Pete ran out in the semi-darkness. Damned old woman, he thought, breathing hard. *Just 'cause I ask for a few bucks, she starts in on my not working. A bum, she calls me.* He jabbed at the air with his fist. *Go back to school and learn to read again.* Huh!

With long, swinging strides, he went into the bar opposite his building. A few Falcons were sitting at a table in back, but Pete was too angry and hurt to want to endure their kidding tonight. He found an empty stool at the bar and ordered a beer.

The beer was cold in his empty stomach. Feeling the anger leave him, he sighed. Only the hurt and the old, familiar sadness were left. He drank again from the half-empty glass.

"Beer tastes good on a hot night, doesn't it?" Pete nodded and looked to his left. His eyes widened in surprise. It was the guy who didn't work, smiling at him. His teeth were bad but his eyes were warm.

"Uh, yeah, beer always tastes good," Pete mumbled, looking away. Nervous, he adjusted his glasses and took another drink. Now what could he say? He looked down at the pack of matches in his hand, noticed his fingers shaking slightly.

The man said in an off-hand manner, "You're a Falcon, aren't you?" Pete took a deep breath and smiled. Here was his opening.

"Yeah, I'm a Falcon." There was pride in his voice. "What about you?"

The man raised one eyebrow. "Me? I'm a writer." Confused, Pete stared at him. The hope that had been rising within him began melting away.

"A writer? " he repeated vaguely. The man ran his finger around the rim of his beer glass.

"Yeah. I write short stories, articles and things for magazines." Emptiness was all Pete felt.

"You write at home and they pay you for it?" He felt the corners of his mouth turn down. The man chuckled.

"They don't always pay me, but yes, I write at home."

Discouraged, Pete rested his arms on the bar. He had been wrong; this guy could never be his

friend. He had a job. And could read and write. Feeling deserted, Pete motioned for another beer.

Whitey, greasy-haired and always cool, strolled up.

"Why don't you come sit with us, Pete? You unsociable tonight?" His voice was kind, almost fatherly. Pete knew better, and he fought to control his resentment.

"No, I'm just talking to this guy is all, okay?" He gestured with his thumb. Whitey smiled across Pete to the man.

"Yeah, sure." He paused, looking at Pete. "How about introducing me to your friend?" Pete frowned. He felt stupid now. Fluttering his hands, he turned to the man. The man nodded at Whitey.

"Dave. Dave Trader," he said. Relieved, Pete picked it up.

"This is Whitey, head man of the Falcons," he mumbled. Whitey straightened, obviously pleased at being identified.

Whitey started talking to Dave, asking him questions. Pete stared at the label on his beer bottle. He recognized the brand by the colors and the symbol printed on it.

After a minute he realized that he was being left out of the conversation. Smooth-talking Whitey was hogging the show.

"Hey, Dave. If you're a writer, how about writing a story about me?" Pete blurted out. He forced a smile and felt Whitey's eyes on him as he licked his lips and waited.

"About you?" What kind of story?" Dave had stopped smiling.

"I don't care. Just any story." Confused, Pete shrugged. "With my name—Pete Comopolis, Pete the Greek." Dave thought a minute, running his fingers through his hair.

"Well, yeah, I could." Pete could see he was embarrassed but he couldn't say forget it now, he'd gone too far. Dave looked up. "All right. I'll do it." He slapped his palm on the bar. "I've had a story in mind about two kids in a gang for a month now and I'll put you in it, Pete. I'll write it tomorrow."

His palms moist with eagerness, Pete watched the door of the bar the next night. He was sitting at a table with Whitey, Linda, and Bender. Whitey was talking to them about the Apaches, a rival gang. Pete hardly heard him; he was nervous and kept squirming in his seat.

There was Dave.

"Dave. Hey, Dave, over here," Pete yelled. Dave came over slowly. Very nervous guy, Pete thought. He must be a little scared of us. Dave sat down and dropped a folded sheaf of papers on the table.

"There it is, Pete. All yours." Doubt starting to grow within him, Pete pulled the papers slowly toward him. He felt Whitey watching him, probably with some jealousy because a real writer had written a story about him. But now what was he going to do? Afraid, he glanced at the top page and pushed the story toward Linda quickly, asking

her with his eyes to save him, to hide his secret. Dave frowned.

"Don't you want to read it?" he asked. He looked from Linda to Pete. "Read it out loud, Pete, for everybody." He waved his arm to include those at the table. Trembling, Pete stared at Linda, who didn't touch the papers. Help me, Linda, he thought. Don't just sit there. Whitey leaned forward, clearing his throat.

"It's like this, Dave. Pete has this problem, see." He paused. Not daring to breathe, Pete stared at his clenched hands.

"What it is, Pete can't read," Whitey said in his sad voice. Bender raised his ugly head.

"Yeah," he said. "Knocked his head, been crazy ever since. We call him—"

"Forget that," Pete exploded. Furious, he was standing, his hand at his hip pocket. The old anger and sadness raged within him, confusing him. "Forget it," he shouted, crumpling up the story and throwing it on the floor. He would have jumped Bender, but knew Whitey would break it up. "Just forget it." Hating everyone, himself included, he ran from the bar. Linda followed him.

"Let's sit on your stoop," Linda said when they were outside.

"No. Go away." Ashamed of himself, he was almost crying from rage and humiliation. He struck out at a metal parking sign. The sign clanged and his hand ached, but he felt better.

"Please, Pete." Giving in, Pete allowed himself to be led across the street. They sat down in front of his apartment house. Eyes narrowed, he rubbed his bruised knuckles and stared at the bar. Linda slipped her arm in his.

"Pete, this didn't used to bother you so much. But the last few months you've been fighting everybody. What is it?" Pete shrugged in answer. Linda hesitated and went on.

"You're so moody all the time. You don't even like to see other people laugh." Discouraged and defeated, Pete took his glasses off and rubbed his eyes with his palms.

"Flake off, will ya, Linda? Just leave me alone." His voice was flat and emotionless. Linda stood up, angry and hurt.

"Have it your own way. But I won't wait around forever. Bender's been asking me out. I just might go." Tossing her hair, she walked away.

Pete cracked his knuckles and stared at her receding figure.

"Linda," he whispered. Don't you turn on me, too. God, I'll be all alone. He drew his knees up to his chest and rested his chin on them. I can't go on like this, he thought. This is no life.

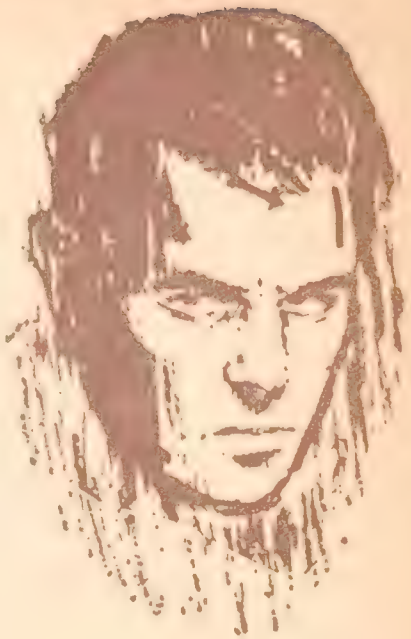
After a few minutes, Dave came out of the bar and went into his building. Hopeful again, Pete sat up straight.

My story. He's got it. Pete touched his finger to his lip.

Maybe Dave was all right. He hadn't laughed when Whitey told him I couldn't read. Maybe he understands. And my story. Excited, Pete stood up and snapped his fingers.

If only I could read my story, read about me being the hero, the big man getting the girl and all, why then nobody could kid me anymore. Especially if it got printed in some big magazine. And there is one way I could learn to read—Dave.

Desire overcoming humiliation, Pete combed his hair with his fingers, took a deep breath, and walked toward Dave's apartment.



"THIS IS hard." Pete was frowning over a first-grade reader in Dave's living room.

"I told you it wouldn't be easy," Dave said, shrugging. Dejected, Pete threw the book down.

"But I been working on this jazz for two months now. How long does it take?" Dave shook his head slowly.

"I never said. Remember, I told you I wasn't a teacher. It may take a year." Pete's mouth dropped.

"A year!" Moaning, he clapped his hand to his forehead. "I'm tired of studyin' this junk already." He looked sideways at Dave. "You haven't told anybody you're helpin' me, have you?"

"No, I haven't told anybody," Dave smiled patiently. "Stop worrying." Pete brightened and leaned forward.

"Tell me my story again," he pleaded. Dave folded his arms across his chest.

"Pete, I've told you the plot of that story a hundred times. I'd like to mail it out soon. Why won't you let me read it to you?" Pete shook his head vigorously.

"Because I want to read it myself. But I like to hear about it. Wait a little longer before you mail it." Dave sighed.

"Okay, okay. Well, Pete the Greek is the leader of this gang—"

Grinning from ear to ear, Pete ordered a beer. As he was drinking, Bender walked into the bar and joined him.

"Hey, Pete. Where you been this morning?" Suspicious, Pete narrowed his eyes.

"No place. Why?" Bender started flipping a coin and catching it in his palm.

"Whitey was lookin' for ya. Nothin' important." Pete relaxed. Bender kept flipping his coin.

"D'ja ever read the story that Trader guy wrote about you?" Inflamed, Pete whirled, grabbing a fistful of Bender's shirt.

"What's it to you?" he hissed through clenched teeth. The coin rolled on the floor.

"Nothin', Pete, nothin'!" Bender's fat belly shook. "What's the matter with you?" Unconvinced, Pete drew his hand away. Bender's eyes sparkled.

"Good thing you didn't read it," he said in a confidential tone. "I read it; it sure ain't nice." Pete frowned at his glass.

"I know what it's about," he said defensively. "I'm the leader of the Bopping Aces and—" Bender cut in.

"Oh, no, man. Where'd you get that? Look, I read it. You're a real chump in this story. He makes a big thing out of you getting conked." The small hairs on Pete's neck stood up. "In the end, you go ape and they put you away. Man, it's bad."

Angry and hurt, Pete fought an impulse to bury his knife in Bender's fat gut.

"You're lying," he said, his voice shaking. Bender looked shocked.

"Hey, watch that stuff." He bent over and picked up his coin. "If you don't believe me, ask Whitey or anybody. They all read it." Baffled, Pete watched Bender amble over to the juke box. Then he got off the stool and walked out. He was sweating.

A lie. He was sure it was a rotten lie. And when he learned to read and could prove it, he'd kill Bender. Then why was he shaking? Afraid to find out and afraid not to, he took a deep breath and headed for the pool room. Whitey would be there.

"Sure, I read it, Pete." Whitey chalked his cue with care. "It goes like this—" Whitey's story was the same as Bender's. Pete leaned on the pool table. He was weak. It couldn't be true. Whitey and Bender were in on it together. Dave wouldn't do that. Would he?

Whitey pushed Pete out of the way to line up a shot.

"It'll look bad for the Falcons if it gets published," he said. "What with your name and all." His greasy hair glistened under the shaded pool lamp. "I thought you said this guy was your friend, Pete."

Heart racing, Pete stumbled outdoors. It was all a bad dream. It had to be. Publish the story? Showing him crazy? Confused as to what action to take, he patted the knife in his pocket and began walking.

He tried to reason the situation out. Now, he thought, frowning, Dave said he wouldn't mail the story in yet. Let's play it cool for a change, and not go off half-cocked.

If I can't read it myself by the time he's ready to publish it, I'll get Linda to read it for me. And if Dave or Whitey and Bender are lying—Nodding, he made a hissing sound through his teeth.

But he'd have to keep busy until then or he'd really go buggy. Only one thing to do. Get a job again.

That night Pete's father read the want ads to him. He decided on a shipper's job in Long Island City. His father also worked out a route on the subway so Pete wouldn't get lost. It took him a long time to go to sleep that night.

He left early the next morning and got the job. All he had to do was wrap packages of wallpaper; no reading. But that afternoon he was asked to sort the packages according to their destinations. Ashamed to admit he couldn't read, Pete tried in vain to figure out the words. His mistakes were noticed within an hour. Afraid of being laughed at, he fought with the foreman and ran from the building.

He was on a subway train before he realized what he had done. A throbbing in his hand made him look down: it was swollen and bruised. He wondered why he had run like such a coward as he wrapped his handkerchief around his hand. But he knew why, and it made him angry and ashamed to face it. As the train pulled into a station, a new fear overcame him. He didn't know where he was and he couldn't read the signs.

Anger, fear and loneliness battling within him, Pete found his way home after four haunted hours of riding the subways. He had refused to ask anyone for help.

Sweaty and exhausted, his world dissolving like a sugar cube in water, he wanted only one thing: to see Linda. He couldn't find her on the block. Shaking from loneliness and fear, he looked through the window of the bar and saw her sitting with another girl. Neither Dave nor the Falcons were there.

"Linda, come here. I gotta see you." He led her by the arm to an empty table. Ordering whisky, he drank two shots before he felt calm enough to light up a cigarette. He inhaled deeply. He felt better just having Linda close to him. Linda looked bored.

"Did you bring me over here to watch you drink and smoke?" Surprised and hurt, Pete held her hand.

"Look, honey, I—I just lost my job today."

She drew her hand away. "What'd you do this time?" Feeling beaten, Pete sagged in his chair.

"Never mind. Linda, I'm scared. I had these plans and they're falling apart. I was gonna take you upstate and work and get away from this." He sat up. "Look, it's not too late. Let's leave, tonight, now." Linda looked down her nose at him.

"You kidding? Me, live with you, on a farm or something?" She laughed. "You're starting to sound as nutty as the guy with your name

in the story." Stunned, Pete blinked and shook his head.

"The story." His voice sounded far away. Linda nodded.

"You know, the story Dave wrote about you." Afraid to breathe, Pete leaned forward.

"You read it?"

"Sure." She waved her hand. "We all read it one day, in here."

"What was I like in the story?" Pete asked hopefully in a whisper.

Linda told him—he was a dumb kid who couldn't read and went crazy. Pete closed his eyes. So it was true.

"I don't know if I'll be going out with you after it's published," she added. Horrified, Pete stared.

"Published?" Linda cocked her head.

"He's mailing it tomorrow. Didn't you know?" In a rage, Pete leaped up. Dave can't mail it, he thought. I can't let him. He ran from the bar, forgetting the girl.

When Dave answered the door, Pete pushed his way in, grinding his teeth in anticipation. Dave looked surprised.

"Pete, what—"

"Shut up, you stinkin' double-crosser." Pete's voice was cold. His lip curled. "I know all about that story you wrote. Makin' me out crazy. And lying to me." Infuriated, he was shouting. Dave backed up, shaking his head.

"You got this all wrong, boy. I don't know what's been going on, but I never lied to you." Dave's Adam's apple was bouncing up and down. Eyes slitted, Pete clenched his right hand.

"Then how come you're mailing my story so soon, trying to get it published before I read it?" Dave wiped his forehead.

"I need some money. I don't write just for fun." His voice was shrill. "Look, I'm going to go in the next room and get that damned story and give it to you. You take it to anybody you want and have them read it to you." Hesitantly, he began walking toward his bedroom door. Pete jumped in front of him.

"No, you don't, buddy. You ain't grabbin' any gun in there." He was breathing hard. Dave tried to step around him.

"I won't—"

Pete pushed him, hard. Dave almost fell, caught himself, and clenched his fists.

"Okay, Pete, have it your way." Although scared, Dave was mad. Both advanced and locked in the middle of the room, wrestling. Pete squeezed his eyes shut, holding Dave to him. He was almost crying from anger and frustration.

Then Dave worked one arm free and jabbed him in the stomach. Wincing in pain, Pete groaned. Sick with a feeling he couldn't comprehend, he threw one around Dave's neck and with the other plunged his knife into Dave's back. He saw the blade come out, red and shiny. Dave slumped against him.

In horror, Pete jumped away, watching him fall. Dave didn't scream or say anything. He lay still. But his eyes were open and some blood trickled out of his nose, staining the rug.

Almost drooling with fear, Pete backed away to the wall, watching. Shaking his head, he dropped the knife. Dead. Dave was dead.

Pete felt a doorknob at his back. Escape. Frantically, he turned it and backed out of the room, still looking at the dead man.

But he wasn't in the hall. He had backed into Dave's bedroom. The light was on.

Pete turned and his mouth opened in surprise.

Books. Hundreds, thousands of books were stuffed into the tiny bedroom. Lining all four walls, on the bed, overflowing from boxes—books. And papers, typed papers, all of Dave's stories, also in boxes, on the bed, stuck between books on the shelves. Quivering, Pete stared at the mountain of words for a full minute. He had never seen so many books.

With a sob, he dropped to his knees in front of a sagging box. "My story—how can I find my story?" Tearing the box apart with one swipe, he watched the contents spill to the floor. "My story." He pushed the papers around, afraid to look at the words, knowing he couldn't read them.

Leaping up, he grabbed at a row of books on a shelf level with his eyes and threw them on the floor.

When all the books were down from one wall, Pete turned to another and grasping the side of the huge bookcase, tumbled it and its contents forward. The bookcase landed on the bed, breaking it and scattering books all over the room. Screaming, Pete kicked at the books, tore piles of manuscripts in half.

As he picked up another manuscript, two words on the top page seemed to leap out at him: Pete Comopolis. Stunned, he shivered and then whispered his name. "Pete Comopolis." He had read that name on the paper.

Excited, he raced around the room, holding the manuscript at arm's length in front of him.

"I read my name," he repeated over and over. "I read my name." A chilling thought struck him and he stood still. *How come I can read my name?* Squinting, he looked again. Yes, yes, he could read his name. *But how?*

Chewing his lip and scowling, Pete shook the pages angrily. The only explanation he could think of was that his fight with Dave might have done it. Hit his head, shock or something. But that wasn't important. Could he read more than his name?

Fearful, trembling with anticipation, he brought the pages up close to his face. The words focused slowly.

"Pete the Greek led the Bopping Aces proudly down the street."

Screaming with ecstasy, he stooped, picked up a handful of loose papers and threw them into the air.

The papers swirled around him like huge snowflakes, like white autumn leaves.

"I can read again!" he shouted at the ceiling, the papers, the books. Laughing, he pulled down another bookcase in celebration. Arms outstretched, he watched the bookcase crash to the floor, shaking the room with its impact.

Finally. Finally gonna read my story. Smiling, he vaulted over the bookcase and found an empty spot on the crushed bed. He settled himself and pushed his glasses up on his nose. To keep the pages steady in his trembling hands, he dug his elbows into his knees.

Blinking rapidly and licking his lips, he began reading. He laughed aloud at the flattering description of himself. Hypnotized, eyes wide, he turned to the second page. He led his brave gang into warfare and won. Page three, four, five. Time stood still and Pete breathed quickly as he read of himself being a hero, respected by police, feared by his enemies. He was the champ. Girls adored him. He dressed in suits and drove a big car. Him, Pete the Greek.

Sighing, he read and reread the last sentence. He didn't want the story to end. It was too good. Smiling triumphantly, he caressed the pages with his fingers.

"Just wait," he said aloud. "Just wait 'til everybody reads this. I'll buy fifty, a hundred copies of the magazine. I'll—" Startled, he glanced around the room. *But it's not gonna be published.* The cold horror came as he saw Dave lying still in the next room.

Stumbling, Pete got to his feet, shaking his head.

"Dave, Dave, you gotta mail it in." His throat was tight. Frowning, he looked from Dave's staring and vacant eyes to the story in his hands. Another thought, like a thunderstorm, slowly formed. "Why, it's not like Linda said it was at all," he mumbled. The storm broke. "Whitey, Bender, but especially Linda, they lied. They—" He couldn't finish. The story dropped from his fingers. Dave was the only one who hadn't lied to him.

With a scream that ended in a hoarse whimper, Pete sank to his knees by the still form. He screamed again and started to cry.

But I can read. And I read my story. He threw his head back and laughed through his tears. What a joke, he thought. I can read and Dave is dead. A fresh peal of laughter shook him. He roared, rocking back and forth on his knees. Then he wanted to cry again. Beating his legs with his fists from ecstasy and horror and loneliness, he was still laughing and crying when the policemen walked in.

IT'S—

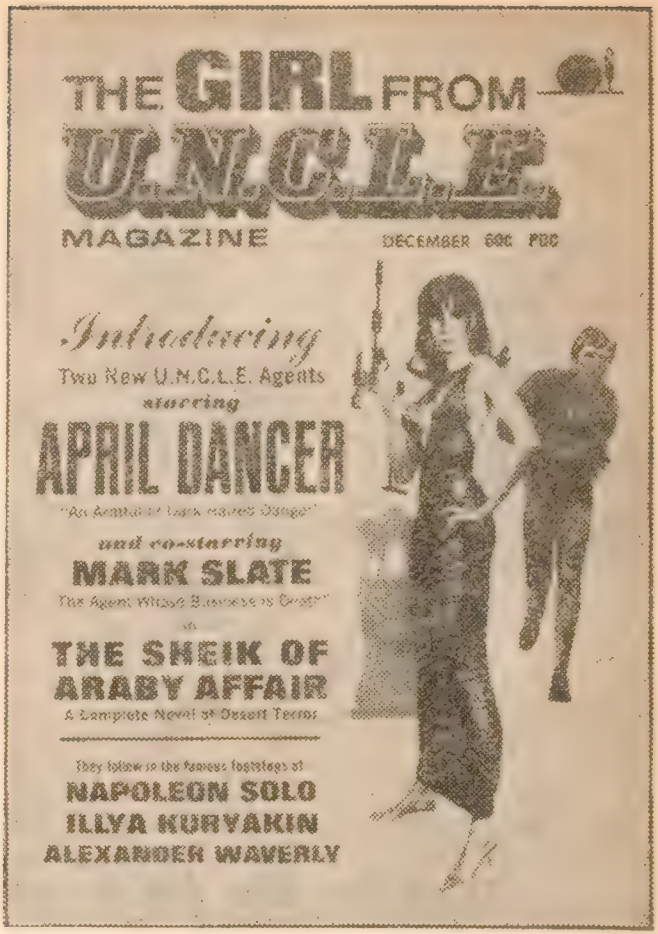
BRAND NEW

IT'S—

WONDERFUL

IT'S—

SENSATIONAL



NOW—FOR THE FIRST TIME ANYWHERE—THE GIRL FROM U.N.C.L.E. MAGAZINE! *Yes, on October 6th you may obtain at your newsdealers the brilliant new addition to the famous* Man from U.N.C.L.E. *which has made video and magazine history everywhere. It features glamorous April Dancer and Mark Slate, the man whose business is danger. And, of course, the famous U.N.C.L.E. trio of espionage and sudden death, Napoleon Solo, Illya Kuryakin and Alexander Waverly. And naturally—that sinister arch enemy, THRUSH! This new magazine will forge a new milestone in the famous U.N.C.L.E. spy-adventure field. Be sure to reserve your copy now!*

LOVE, KINDNESS and AUTHORITY

by
RICHARD O. LEWIS

When hope goes and the last chance fails and Terror is the only master—then a certain breed of man will still fight on.

THEY FILED into Schulsmeyer's Delicatessen just as Schulsmeyer was making ready to close shop for the night. They took up lounging positions here and there against the glass display cases, wherein rested the tempting sausages, the spiced roasts, the salads, and the various other items of trade.

There were five of them. They ranged in age from fifteen to eighteen. They wore black leather jackets, and they called themselves The Black Jacks.

Schulsmeyer peered down questioningly from one to the other of them over the gold frames of his glasses. He was a tall, thin man with sparse yellow hair turning to gray and eyes of faded blue. He wore a white coat that reached down to well below his knees. He

prided himself in cleanliness; he donned a fresh coat each morning, and if the smock became smudged during the day, he quickly laid it aside for another. Monday nights, he gathered up the entire lot and sent them to Wong to be laundered once more.

"Yes?" he said. "Is there something you wish?"

None of them answered. They continued to loll about, not looking at him.

Schulsmeyer felt hot color begin to rise at the base of his neck. He enjoyed waiting on customers, and he took great pride in the dishes he prepared.

But this was somehow different. Annoying.

"Yes?" he said again. "Is there something you wish to buy?"

One of the boys turned to face him across the crystal clear glass of the meat cooler. He was a tall boy with dark eyes and a mouth set into hard, unsmiling lines. His dark hair was combed low over his brow and down the back of his neck. Schulsmeyer had seen just such a haircut once on TV when a group of young men had been playing noisy guitars and jumping up and down and taking turns screaming out unintelligible *nyah-nyah-nyahs.* He didn't like that kind of haircut.

"We didn't come to buy, Schulsie. We came to sell." The voice sounded as hard as the mouth and eyes looked.

Schulsmeyer put out his hands, palms up. "But what have you to sell that I need? I see nothing—"

"You need insurance, Schulsie, insurance against breakage. And we're here to see that you get it!"

One of the boys dropped a coin into the soft drink dispenser and pulled out a bottle.

Schulsmeyer turned at the sound. The boy had dark eyes and eyebrows. But his hair, hanging low over brow and neck, was pale blond. Schulsmeyer was held in momentary fascination. Could it be true? Could parents possibly permit a child like that to *bleach* his hair?

The boy decapped the bottle and set it to his lips, his eyes boring directly into Schulsmeyer's as he tilted his head back.

"I'll put it to you straight, Schulsie."

Schulsmeyer turned to face the dark-haired boy again.

"You take our insurance, and nothing gets broken. Your cases, your beautiful window with your name on it—nothing."

"But nothing of mine gets broken. Why should I pay insurance to keep things from being broken when nothing gets broken?"

"That's what the Chinaman thought. He wouldn't take out insurance. Then his glass door got broken. Now he has insurance."

Last week when Schulsmeyer had gone to Wong's for his bundle of laundered coats, Wong's door had been boarded over. No one

knew how the glass had got smashed; it had happened sometime at night. When asked about it, Wong had shrugged his shoulders in a dejected manner and remained silent.

"Why, you—" Schulsmeyer felt the surge of hot blood rise suddenly higher in his neck as full understanding reached him.

"It will cost you twenty-five dollars a week!"

"Twenty-five dollars a week! You are crazy! A bunch of crazy kids! Get out! I will call the police!" Schulsmeyer turned and started toward the wall telephone.

"Don't do it, Schulsie! It'll just be your word against ours! And we haven't done anything to you—yet!"

Schulsmeyer reached a trembling hand toward the instrument, then spun suddenly about as the explosive sound of shattering glass smote against his ears. The glass top of the case housing the salads was a shambles, and glass shards were sparkling up, prismlike, from lettuce leaf and cottage cheese. The boy with the bleached hair stood beside the case, the neck of a broken bottle in his hand, his eyes round with innocence.

"Oops!" he said. "I must have dropped it!"

Rage gripping him, Schulsmeyer wheeled away from behind the row of display cases. As he rounded the end of the meat case, he was met by the tall boy with the dark hair. He saw the switchblade in the hand, its point aimed directly at the front of his white coat, and he heard the metallic sound of the soft drink machine dispensing another bottle.

Schulsmeyer tried desperately to get his trembling body under control. He wanted to reach out, grab the boy by the neck and shake some sense into his head. He wanted to strike out against them, throw them out the door into the street. But he didn't dare. He didn't know what they might do, each trying to be a hero in the eyes of the others.

He hoped someone might come in at the moment, but the chance of that happening was remote. All his regular customers knew that he closed promptly at nine, should have been closed ten minutes ago. And at present, a sudden shower of rain was drenching the streets. He was alone, and there seemed no way to turn.

He eyed the hard face of the boy before him, and slow recognition began to find its way into his confusion. "Why, I—I know you!" he said. "You are the boy called Patsy! You live down the street in the next block! Your father, Mr. Pazzi, is a customer! He comes in to buy the liverwurst for the sandwiches of his lunch! I—I will speak to him!"

"No, Schulsie, you will not squeel to the cops or to my old man or to anyone. If you do, there will be no glass window left in the front

of your store by this time next week. And every time you put a new one in, something will happen to it!"

The point of the switchblade inched closer. "You will pay your first premium now! Twenty-five dollars! And, after that, one of us will call on you each Tuesday night!"

Schulsmeyer took an involuntary and shuffling step backwards. "But, twenty-five dollars! I cannot afford—"

The blade of the knife followed him, and in the background he saw a boy with a freckled and pimply face raise a bottle menacingly over the delicate case wherein rested the pies and the cakes. His breath came out slowly and haltingly, and he shook his head as if to clear it of an evil dream. Then he turned away from the knife and went to the cash register on the steel cabinet at the end of the meat case.

"I will pay you this one time," he said. "But I will do a lot of hard thinking before next time!"

Patsy shoved the bills into the breast pocket of his jacket and returned the knife to a side pocket, a satisfied smirk spreading across his face. "The harder you think, Schulsie, the more reasons you will find to keep up your payments."

The boy with the freckles shook the bottle violently in his hands, flipped the cap from it, and tossed the spewing bottle into the shattered case.

Then they filed out into the rain, leaving the door open.

It was after ten by the time Schulsmeyer got all the loose glass pulled out of the damaged case and the mess cleaned up and the ruined salads disposed of. He hung up his soiled smock, donned a worn sweater, turned off all the lights except the small ones in the display cases, and stepped out into the night. It had all but stopped raining, but the streets were quite deserted.

Although he knew he would have to go to work much earlier than usual the following morning in order to make a number of fresh salads, he didn't turn directly into the stairway that led to his little apartment directly above the store. Instead, he walked slowly down the murky street, feeling very much alone in a world that was becoming increasingly difficult to understand.

Patsy had been right. The harder he thought on his problem now, the more he became convinced that there was no way out. If he told the police, nothing much would become of it; he had no proof of any kind, and the result would be a shattered window. He thought of consulting Wong, having him go to the police with him. But, again, the result would be the same—shattered windows sometime in the future and then be faced with the same problem all over again.

He went across the street into the next block and, moments later,

was pushing open the door marked Joe's Place. He felt in the need of someone to talk with, even though the talk would have no bearing upon his problem.

The place was nearly deserted. He got a glass of beer at the bar, crossed over to a small table, and let himself slump down into one of the chairs, feeling more alone than ever. He knew none of the three men who were chatting companionably at the far end of the bar.

Schulsmeyer sipped his beer in thoughtful silence. He could sell out, go away. But where? And what would he do—start all over again? He had run the little store on Barlow Street for more than thirty years, had raised his only son there, had buried his wife from the little church further down the street. If he went somewhere else, he would merely be a stranger in a strange land. And yet, he could not possibly afford twenty-five dollars a week—

The door swung open, and a man of middle age and medium height entered. His black hair showed traces of gray at the temples, and his face, although etched with hard lines, still had a certain buoyancy of youth about it.

He gestured a greeting to Schulsmeyer, went to the bar, and returned shortly with two beers.

"Well," he said, sitting down and pushing one of the beers toward Schulsmeyer, "the old salami slicer himself!"

Schulsmeyer acknowledged the greeting with what was intended to be a friendly nod. He remained silent, his face drawn. Now he was afraid to speak lest the words come out all wrong. Slightly more than an hour ago, a boy called Patsy had held a switchblade pointed directly at him; now Mr. Pazzi, the boy's father, was sitting across the table from him, friendly, bantering—

Pazzi sipped his beer and regarded Schulsmeyer intently over the rim of the glass. Then he set the glass down and leaned forward.

"What's the matter?" he asked, "You look like you got big, big troubles."

Schulsmeyer took a deep breath and let it out again. "Your boy wears a black leather jacket?" he said. It was more a statement than a question.

Pazzi nodded. "His mother bought it for him. He said he needed it so he could belong to some kind of boys' club or lodge or something." A look of apprehension had begun to spread across his face. "Why?"

Schulsmeyer didn't realize fully what he was saying. The bitter words came tumbling out almost without any volition of his own.

The hard lines in Pazzi's face grew deeper as the story unfolded. The muscles in the corners of his clamped jaws swelled and tightened into hard knots. Anger began to set his dark eyes ablaze, as he sat stunned.

"I—I can't believe this!" he said, the words coming from tight lips. "I cannot believe I have a—a *gangster* in my own house!"

"You may look at Wong's door," said Schulsmeyer sadly. "You may look at my show case, the broken bottle, the ruined salads—"

Pazzi leaned suddenly across the table.

"Schulsmeyer," he said, "believe me! You will have no further trouble with my boy from this day on!" He pushed himself purposefully back from the table and got to his feet, fists, clinched.

"Wait!" Schulsmeyer said, clutching his arm. "Wait!"

"No!"

"Wait! Please!" His long fingers dug into Pazzi's sleeve. "Please sit down!"

Reluctantly, Pazzi let himself be pulled down again into his chair.

Schulsmeyer pushed the glass of beer toward him.

"Drink!" he said. "And please listen!"

Pazzi gripped the glass with trembling fingers, but he didn't drink. He sat as one who had just been stunned.

"Please listen!" Schulsmeyer said again, trying to make his words penetrate Pazzi's anger. "Whatever you do to your boy will have no effect upon the others. They will break my window in revenge, and I will still have to pay the money I cannot afford to pay! Punishing your boy now will not solve the problem for me! Nor for Wong! Nor for any of the others!"

Pazzi remained silent, his dark eyes staring at nothing at all.

"And perhaps it will not solve your own problem. Nor your boy's problem."

"I will punish him!" said Pazzi. "I will force him to quit the gang, to tell me the names of the others! Then we shall consult the parents!"

Schulsmeyer shook his head.

"I have had more time to think on this than you have," he said. "And I have given it much hard thought. They have their feet in quicksand. No matter how dangerous it becomes, none must be the first to pull out his foot. And your boy will not tell you the names of the others. If he told, he would not dare go out again on the streets alone."

Pazzi glanced questioningly at Schulsmeyer, his eyes slowly regaining their focus. "The others would work him over," he said. "Which might maim him for life."

"And so, he will not tell!" said Schulsmeyer, with finality.

"Do you know any of the others?"

"One has blond hair. Bleached, I think."

"I have seen him," said Pazzi, "but I do not know him."

"One has freckles and sandy hair."

"That one I know. I have seen him with Patsy. He is Ed Benson's boy. Ed works at the plant—"

"I cannot describe the others."

"Maybe Wong will know one. Maybe someone else will know another. Or we could follow them, see where they went, where they lived. It should then not be too difficult to see their parents—"

"And so," Schulsmeyer, said nodding, "some of the parents will not believe. Some will give out a small punishment, tell the boys how naughty they have been, and two or three weeks later my plate glass window is shattered one night, and no one knows anything about it happened."

They fell silent.

"You have a solution?" Pazzi asked, finally.

Schulsmeyer drained his glass, set it upon the table, and shook his head.

"None!" he said, and ordered two more beers.

"The trouble with most of them," said Pazzi, after another thoughtful silence, "is that they have been given everything since the day they were born. They have not had to work for anything as we did. Nothing has value. Everything in the world is free for the taking."

"The paddle has been laid aside. There is no respect for authority. My wife is raising our son with love and kindness, she says. The last time I tried to punish him, all I got from the both of them was angry words, or no words at all, for many days. I was an outcast in my own house!"

"Love and kindness is good," Schulsmeyer said. But respect for property and authority is also good. I taught my own boy such respect. He now holds a position that demands a certain amount of authority from him. Without first learning to respect authority, he could not now be holding a position of authority. He is a good boy. And now, after he is gone for seven years, his letters tell me that he may come to see me as soon as—"

Schulsmeyer broke off. He saw the muscles in Pazzi's jaws rapidly tightening again. He realized his mistake. He should not have bragged so much about the goodness of his own son.

Pazzi pushed back his chair and got suddenly to his feet.

Schulsmeyer reached his side and clutched his arm. "You must not do it!" he said. "You will release your own feelings, yes! But you will solve the problems, no!"

"He should be thrashed within an inch of his life!"

"All should receive just punishment for what they have done! All

should be taught respect! But, first, we should do some hard thinking on it! Find a solution! Then we shall meet again! Promise me that!"

Pazzi stood rigid for sixty seconds before his shoulders finally slumped in resignation.

"I will try, Schulsmeyer," he said. "I will promise you that much. I will try."

He turned away and walked slowly out the door.

IT WAS Tuesday night, a few minutes before time to close up shop. The boy with the freckles, Ed Benson's boy, faced Schulsmeyer over the cash register, the cigarette in the corner of his mouth sending a small spiral of smoke up past a pimpled cheek. There was a look of bored contempt upon his face as he took the bills from Schulsmeyer's long fingers and shoved them into a pocket of his jacket. Then he flipped the cigarette to the floor, turned, and swaggered out.

"Still so much like a child," Schulsmeyer thought, gazing after him. "A lost child in need of help." He shook his head slowly. "And dangerous in his need!"

One week later, the boy with the bleached hair put in his appearance. Schulsmeyer knew him now. Ted Westerly, his father a construction worker.

He handed him the money and gazed after him as he left. "He wants attention. He even bleaches his hair so people will notice him." Schulsmeyer took off his glasses, wiped them on the hem of his white coat, and put them on again. "Perhaps he will soon get the attention he craves."

At ten o'clock that night, the Black Jacks held their regular weekly meeting in a secluded corner of the basement of a condemned apartment building. They had piled barrels and crates from one wall to the behemoth of rust that had once been a furnace, so that the dim light that hung over the table was fenced in from three sides.

Patsy stood at one end of the table, a sheaf of bills in his hand. "One hundred and twenty-five. Twenty-five apiece." He counted the money into five piles. "The Chink, the Dutchman, the shoe store, the hardware, the grocery. And we will get more. Much more!" He looked from one to the other of the four seated around the table. "Any suggestions?"

Ted Westerly was leaning with the back of his chair against the stone wall, his feet crossed on the table, his left eye closed against the cigarette smoke that was trying to get into it. "How about that little greasy spoon on sixteenth?"

Patsy shook his head. "Out. It's open all night, and there are always customers coming in. Best not to sell our policy in front of witnesses."

"There's the drug store on fourteenth—"

"Look into it. We might work on it next."

"How about the taverns?" Westerly asked.

"We're juveniles. Remember? We're not allowed in bars."

"And we wouldn't think of breaking the law!" said Westerly.

That brought a laugh.

"And there is a little something that must be taken care of right away. Since old Hank at the service station has refused our insurance, he must be shown the light. We'll draw lots—"

Patsy broke off and wheeled around as the sound of footsteps reached him.

A lone man was striding leisurely toward them from out of the shadows. He was slightly taller than average and very well put together. He wore the blue uniform of the city police.

"All right, copper!" said Patsy. "What are you doing here?"

The officer walked into the direct rays of the light. His eyes were of deep blue, there was a smile on his square face, and he carried himself with an air of self-assurance. He stopped and gazed levelly at each of the boys in turn.

"I came to sell you an insurance policy," he said, his voice as level as his gaze. "Insurance against damage. *Personal damage,* that is!"

"You're nuts!" said Patsy. "How did you get in here? The door was locked."

"I came early. I've been waiting for you."

"Then you'd better get back out!" said Patsy. "You're not wanted here!" The other boys had come from the table to stand in a menacing group, two of them with their hands buried deep in the side pockets of their jackets.

The officer backed off a pace, paused, and raised a restraining hand. Again, his eyes swept from one to the other of them, and the half smile remained upon his lips, as if he might be enjoying some kind of private joke.

"Wait," he said. "First, you must listen to the terms of the policy. One, you will pay Wong the price of a new door. Two, you will pay for Mr. Schulsmeyer's display case. And, three, you will pay back every dollar you have collected. For that, you will not receive personal damage!"

Patsy took a step closer and peered into the officer's face. "I've seen you before. You're from somewhere around here. I'll find out."

"Let's give him a little of his own personal damage!" said the blond Ted Westerly. "Like taking his gun away from him and jamming it down his throat!"

"That would be hard," said the officer, "since I don't happen to be wearing one."

"Then you are sillier than I thought!" said Westerly as two of the others stepped up beside him.

The officer continued to smile, and five figures filed out of the shadows to form into a line behind him. They wore long white coats precisely like those worn daily by Schulsmeyer. New rubbers hid their shoes, rubbers that might easily have come from the local shoe store. And over the head of each, with holes cut for eyes and nose, was the kind of brown paper bag that could be found in most any grocery store. They stood silently, feet apart, hands clasped behind their backs.

"What is this, a bunch of Ku Kluxers?" said one of the boys, the slight quiver in his voice destroying the intended bravado.

"I will give you one more chance to accept the insurance policy," said the officer.

"We're not buying!" said Patsy. "And if your bunch of disguised coppers are planning on roughing us up, you'd better think twice about it! There's a law protecting minors."

"I guess I'm not a very good salesman," said the officer. "Very well, then!" He drew a folded bit of paper from the breast pocket of his blouse, unfolded it, glanced at it, and stepped forward. "Which one of you is Jerry Walton?"

A tall boy with a thin face looked toward Patsy and back again. "I—I am," he said.

"Step out and stand here." The officer indicated a spot with a pointing finger.

Jerry Walton looked nervously at the two boys beside him but made no move.

A head shot suddenly out, fingers fastened into the throat of a black jacket, and balled fist and jacket came up hard enough beneath a chin to bring the owner of the chin up and off of his toes and to go spinning around in such a manner as to land precisely upon the indicated spot.

"I do not repeat orders!" said the officer. "Now take off that jacket and toss it over there!"

Walton's thin face had gone pale enough to make his dark eyes seem large and bulbous by contrast. He took off his jacket and tossed it exactly upon the right spot.

"Now your trousers!"

There was a flash of rebellion in Walton's eyes, but it disappeared immediately. He unfastened his belt and went hopping around, first on one foot and then the other, until he succeeded in getting his trousers pulled off over his shoes. Then he tossed them to the floor by the jacket.

"Now stand against that wall," directed the officer. "And don't you dare move from there until I tell you to!"

The officer did not bother to consult the folded paper again. He wheeled to face the others. "You!" he said, pointing at Ted Westerly.

Westerly sauntered slowly forward, hands jammed deep into the side pockets of his jacket, his

bleached hair garish in the glow of light. He stopped directly before the officer.

"Listen, copper," he said, his lips pulled hard against his teeth, "how would you like to take a—"

The sound was sudden and sharp, almost as startling as a pistol shot. Westerly went reeling sideways for three staggering steps before gaining a measure of equilibrium. He stood with head held to one side, his cheek white where the open palm had struck, the lids of his left eye squeezed tightly shut to hold back the flow of water. He needed no second command.

Neither did any of the others.

Minutes later, they were standing in a line by the wall, jacketless and trouserless, their faces filled with apprehension.

The officer brought a chair from the table and set it firmly upon the floor. "You!" he said, pointing at Jerry Walton. "Come here!"

Walton came immediately, hopping forward on skinny white legs that had begun to tremble.

"Bend yourself over that chair!"

Walton did so.

One of the robed figures stepped forth and brought his hands from behind his back. In the right one was a half length of yardstick. It was strong and lithe, and in block letters on one side was the word HARDWARE. It swept down suddenly with the sting of a blacksnake and brought forth a cry of surprise and pain. Again and

again, it rose and fell upon the striped shorts.

One by one, the boys and the robed figures took their turns. Only the last one, Patsy, rebelled. He raised his fists in a last gesture of defiance as the officer approached him. A split second later, he was spinning backwards away from the wall and across the floor, his feet back-peddling in an effort to keep up with the rest of him. He hit the chair and collapsed over it and with it to the floor.

The officer was by his side in an instant. "Get up and get across that chair before I kick your teeth in!" he said, and the way he said it carried a lot of weight.

The fifth robed figure applied his stick with a vehemence that outshown all the others. Patsy kept his eyes tightly closed against the tears that were pushing hard against them, but he did not sob or cry out as the stinging blows continued to fall, rapidly and forcefully.

Finally, the officer stepped for-

ward and caught hold of the arm of the robed figure.

"That will be enough," he said. "For now."

They were no longer gangsters; they were a sorry group of scared boys, some of the younger ones wiping noses and eyes with the sleeves of their shirts.

The officer stood before them.

"If anyone does not now wish to buy the insurance against personal damage, let him speak," he said, the half smile still upon his lips. "And we shall begin the sales pitch all over again."

No one spoke; all were buying.

While two of the robed figures gathered money from the table and trouser pockets and the other three cut black jackets from hem to collar with switchblades, the officer delivered a short lecture.

"Each of you will get a job after school or Saturdays or both. You will turn over your earnings to Mr. Schulsmeyer each week until your total indebtedness has been paid. And if any breakage of any kind occurs in this area, you will be searched out one by one and brought here for a little extra persuasion, after which you will be forced to work just that much longer. Any questions?"

There were no questions.

IMMEDIATELY after handing over the money to the bleached Ted Westerly and closing up shop that night, Schulsmeyer had gone directly to Joe's Place, where he seated himself at a small table and drank slowly and thoughtfully from his glass, making each beer last as long as possible.

He had just finished his third glass when the door opened and Mr. Pazzi entered. Mr. Pazzi gestured a greeting to him, went to the bar, returned with two glasses of beer, and sat down at the table. His dark eyes were glowing with an inner excitement, and a flitting smile kept breaking up the hard lines about his mouth.

Schulsmeyer raised the fresh glass of beer and gazed questioningly down over the rims of his own glasses and the rim of the glass in his hand.

"Well?" he said.

Pazzi took a long drink, returned the glass to the table, and wiped his lips.

"I believe many problems were solved this night," he said, earnestly. "I think we will now have a fine group of youngsters in our neighborhood."

Schulsmeyer nodded slowly. "Good," he said. "Good."

"The greatest trouble I had was getting the rest of the fathers to go along with the masquerade bit and to go with me to the basement. But after they listened and heard from the lips of their own sons what had been going on, they went along with the rest of the show willingly enough, each taking care of his own.

"Do you think the boys recognized their fathers?"

Pazzi shrugged and shook his head. "I don't know. Maybe. Or maybe they thought we were policemen in disguise or a group of the local merchants they have been bothering—or a combination of all three. Anway, they will be confused as to who or how many will be watching them from now on. And the presence of the policeman, of course, will certainly add to their confusion."

Schulsmeyer sipped at his beer. "I have been thinking for some time now," he said finally, "of hiring a boy to clean up and help with the salads on Saturday mornings and to make deliveries in the evenings and on Saturday afternoons. Do you suppose your son Patsy would be interested in the job?"

Pazzi grinned. "He'll jump at the chance!" he said.

"And I will treat him with love and kindness," said Schulsmeyer. "Just as long as he has respect for authority!" he added.

"And speaking of authority," said Pazzi, "your son certainly carried himself with an air of authority in his rented police uniform!"

"Yes," said Schulsmeyer, smiling his pleasure. "I suppose being a non-commissioned officer, a sergeant of the Marines, for four years does give one a certain air of authority."

He finished his beer. "And now I must go to the apartment so we may visit. His leave is but a very short one."

Both men arose, and Pazzi took the tall man's hand in a firm grasp.

"Thanks, Schulsmeyer," he said. "Thanks for everything!"

Halfway to the door, he paused and turned. "And Schulsmeyer," he said, the grin beginning to play about his lips again. "From this night on, I think I shall carry a certain air of authority into my own house!"

FOR FASTER SERVICE—USE ZIP CODE NUMBERS! REMEMBER, ZIP NUMBERS ARE PART OF YOUR ADDRESS! AVOID LAST MINUTE RUSH! MAIL EARLY IN THE DAY! IT'S THE FASTER WAY!

A DIRECT HIT for ERLE STANLEY GARDNER Fans!

and All Mystery Lovers

11 GREAT MYSTERIES

including 9 by Erle Stanley GARDNER

ALL YOURS for only **$1.00** as a new member (Reg. $38.40 in Orig. Publ. Eds.)

You Get 4 *Perry Mason* Thrillers

and 4 DONALD LAM-BERTHA COOL Hits — All by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER — in 4 Double-Length, Hard-Bound Volumes!

1 The Case of the BEAUTIFUL BEGGAR
Who POISONED Daphne Shelby? Perry Mason is stumped. Then comes the *shocker!*

2 CUT THIN TO WIN
Donald Lam gives a woman $10,000 for an "accident" that now looks like an *alibi for murder!*

3 The Case of the TROUBLED TRUSTEE
Perry's client had the chance to KILL! Soon he'll have the chair. *Unless . . .*

4 UP FOR GRABS
Nurse Doon is *terrified* when a patient disappears from the hospital! She *knows* the woman who left was DEAD!

5 The Case of the HORRIFIED HEIRS
Perry's client only met Mrs. Trent once. But SOMEONE WANTS TO KILL THEM BOTH!

6 FISH OR CUT BAIT
Who DRUGGED Bertha Cool? *Not* the woman who made those threats. *She's* being *murdered!*

7 The Case of the PHANTOM FORTUNE
Perry is forced to defend *himself*. The charge? *Framing an attempted murder!*

8 TRY ANYTHING ONCE
Donald Lam is in for *trouble*. But he can't resist $2,000 for spending one night in a motel!

AND

You Also Get This Big THREE-IN-ONE VOLUME

Containing GARDNER'S Latest DONALD LAM Hit and TWO MORE New Mystery Thrillers!

9 WIDOWS WEAR WEEDS by A. A. Fair (Gardner)
The police have *eyewitnesses* that say Donald Lam committed MURDER!

10 THE UNEXPECTED MRS. POLLIFAX by Dorothy Gilman
Mrs. Pollifax spies for the CIA and ends up in a *painful* interrogation!

11 THE RESURRECTION MAN by Thomas Walsh
What would YOU do if *your own father* committed murder!

(Continued on Other Side)

FIRST CLASS
PERMIT No. 47
Roslyn, N.Y.

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL
No postage stamp necessary if mailed in the United States

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
Roslyn, L. I.
New York 11576